

Stephen and Bonnie Larsen Family



2015

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1/5/15-Perfect Love

Hello Everyone!

Hope everyone enjoyed New Year's! I thought about cutting back on sweets, but they're just too delicious! The past week has been pretty good. We're struggling when it comes to finding people to teach. Knocking doors has not been very effective lately. I was on exchanges with Elder Zubeck. We parked the car and began making the rounds. We came to one door with a hastily written note "Get Lost Mormons!" That was pretty funny.

Later in the week Elder Van Haren and I went to meet with an excommunicated lady and found a note on her door that read "This is the Place". I guess you could say that our reception is very wide-ranging...

Meeting with Rex this past week I think we made some headway. He told us that being baptized was something he would consider, but his wife would have to be a part of it. They both have some health problems that make it difficult to get around, but I'm hoping and praying we can find a way for them.

We had a return appointment with a college-age Mennonite girl and her mother this past week. Turns out her mom is a pastor of the local congregation and was very familiar with who we are and what we do, but was surprisingly friendly. She went to a temple open-house in Oregon. When asked if anything stood out to her, she replied that she was a little overwhelmed by how formal everything was. She was looking for a simpler faith. It got me thinking.

I think a lot of people view the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as a very tough church to be a part of with a very complicated belief system. It's definitely one of the most if not the most difficult church to be a part of because we are asked to do so much. But, as Joseph Smith said "A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary [to lead] unto life and salvation..." The Church is the way it is because it is God's church and not man's.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

"This is [God's] work and [God's] glory". There is only one way. Be grateful you have the knowledge of it. Live it.

My theme for 2015 is "Perfect Love". I'll never achieve it this year or any year, but I know that as I love God with all my heart, soul, and mind and others as myself, I will become better. I love this work. I love the Gospel. I love my Savior and will try harder this year to show it.

I love you all.

Elder Larsen

1/5/15-New Year

Dear Family,

Can you believe it's 2015? We had quite the exciting New Year's--getting inside by 7 o'clock and then going through the ward roster :-). We got pizza and slurpies, which made it fun.

It was such a sweet week, culminating with Church yesterday. For the first time in my mission, everyone who committed to come to Church was there. Such a miracle!

Jody--who hasn't been to Church in years and years--came with her 4-year-old son named Noah. She confessed to being active as a teen because she wanted to marry Steve Young, but luckily now she's coming for the Gospel :-)

The Locketts--a mother and daughter--came, after saying several months ago that they didn't know when they would ever come back to Church. They even got up and bore their testimonies. The Lord definitely softens hearts!

Angela and her kids were also there. It was so sweet to see Dre (the 15-year-old) walk up to the Bishop to pay his fast offering. Angela is still overcoming smoking, and they've been reading the scriptures as a family each day. They are so humble, and it touches me that they accept everything we teach without question--they just really want to get closer to God. It was sweet; we asked Angela what she had been learning in the Book of Mormon, and she texted us back, "Well, I've been learning about Nephi and Lemuel, and how God sent a message to Lephi--a message to kill Lemuel." A twist on a Book of Mormon story, but learning nonetheless!

Out of all the people who made it to Church, the biggest miracle was Tameka. We knocked on Tameka's door earlier this week, and she immediately let us in to talk with her. She has the sweetest 6-year-old son named Magnus, who has autism. Tameka eagerly listened to the message of the Restoration, and said she would come to Church, although she was worried about Magnus. He has a lot of energy, and it can be hard for him to sit still. She was worried about him making noise during the sacred parts of the service, but we reassured her that there are lots of kids at Church!

Well, Sunday rolled around, and Tameka came with Magnus, all dressed up. He struggled sitting still during the Sacrament, and Tameka spent a good part of the meeting walking the halls. Nonetheless, she stayed all 3 hours, tried to take notes, and wanted to pay tithing. The sweetest part was during relief society. Magnus tried to run away from Tameka during the lesson, and so she had to take him out into the hall. Sister Whisnant--a woman in the ward--followed Tameka to try to help. Sister Whisnant also has a son with autism, very similar to Magnus. She was able to help Tameka get Magnus calmed down, and reassure her that she's had similar things happen to her.

It touched me how well the Lord knows each of us. He knew that Tameka would feel self-conscious coming to Church, and so He made sure Sister Whisnant was there to reach out and befriend her--someone with the same circumstances, who could understand and reassure Tameka. Because of that tender mercy, Tameka said she felt very loved and accepted, and will be back at Church next week.

It amazes me how well our Heavenly Father knows us--each of us. There's a song we were listening to this week that sums it up well. It says,

"If you're feeling all alone, and you need someone to love you,
If you don't know how you'll ever make it through...
If everything's gone wrong, and you need someone to listen,
There's someone that is always there for you.

Though the road keeps getting longer, and you're far
away from home
Just remember someone loves you more than you
could ever know.
Every night and every morning, in sunshine or in rain,
No matter where, He's always there; Just one prayer
away".

I know Heavenly Father is aware of each of us. He
knows us, loves us, and sees us as we may become.
I'm so grateful for Him!

All my love,

Sister Larsen

Aniya, Milan, and PJ :-)) They're the sweetest family that we're trying to help come back to Church. We asked what we could do for their family, and Aniyah replied, "I just want to get in the water!" (Meaning, she wants to get baptized). Such sweethearts!



Anne Marie had to take care of an egg for her class. ☺



1/12/15-Don't Give Up

Well howdy.

Drumroll, please....Elder Van Haren will be leaving and I'll be holding down Goshen. I'm happy to be staying, but am a little concerned who I'll be getting. Guess I'll find out Wednesday.

I guess the ward's really desperate for musical numbers because Elder Wolverton and I sang an arrangement of "Nearer, My God, to Thee". Lesson learned: tomato juice is very difficult to clean off the pulpit...no, I think we actually did ok.

Aisha and Larry are both doing great. Larry will actually be teaching in Elder's Quorum next Sunday...go figure. He went to school to become a minister and has been studying up a storm, so I'm excited.

Saturday morning we were contacting some potential investigators and doing some tracting. It was cold, my gloves and boots were wet, no one was answering the door, our appointments for the day were being cancelled, our phone was wiggin' out...it was rough. I think we were both at the point of deciding where to bury each others' bodies. "We're going to knock this last door and then I'm done." As always happens when you're just about to give up, this guy opened the door, let us in, and we had a great lesson. He's under house arrest for the next eleven months and I'm hoping to start teaching him.

I think that for one, God has a sense of humor. Two, I think He wants us to prove to ourselves that we can endure through tough times in order to be blessed. Success in missionary work as well as life in general us is usually to be found at the end of the day when our strength and willpower is almost totally gone, when we're just barely putting one step in front of the other. Then the sun rises and we find ourselves physically and spiritually renewed.

"Each of us is a runner in the race of life. Comforting is the fact that there are many runners. Reassuring is the knowledge that our eternal Scorekeeper is understanding. Challenging is the truth that each must run. But you and I do not run alone. That vast audience of friends, and leaders will cheer our courage, will applaud our determination as we rise from our stumblings and pursue our goal. Let us shed any thought of failure. Let us discard any habit that may hinder. Let us seek; let us obtain the prize prepared for all, even exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God." (President Monson)

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

"I never said it would be easy, but I did say it would be worth it." Life's tough. We are given so many opportunities to throw our hands up in the air and say "I'm done! I quit". When the going get's tough,*don't* give up. "Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ." When you can't stand it any longer, kneel. You're going to make it.

Elder Larsen

1/12/15-Disappointing News and Spanish

Dear Family,

I've heard people say that missions are a mini-version of our lives. And--like life--missions are certainly full of ups and downs!

This week, we've been praying and praying that a sweet YSA--Kyairah--could make it to Church. She moved here back in the summertime, but works most Sundays at Burger King, and so she hasn't been to Church since July. She is the only member in her family, which also complicates things. Well, she got work off, and made it to Church! It's amazing to see how the Lord is in even the small details of our lives.

The Stewarts also made it to Church, and we were planning to have their baptism interview immediately following the block. After Sacrament Meeting, I asked Angela, "Are you nervous at all for your interview?" She replied, "No, because I'm not doing it. I'm not getting baptized." My heart sunk. Angela was pretty defensive, and explained that she didn't understand why she needed to be baptized again, or why there were requirements for Baptism. We were caught completely off guard. We think--like Tom--Angela is struggling with some of the commandments, and it's easier to doubt the Gospel than to doubt herself. We told them how much we love their family, and that they are always welcome. We're not giving up on them, because we don't want Angela to give up on herself! They need the Gospel!

So...that's had us feeling a little down, but I've been thinking a lot about something a woman told us this week. She meant to say, "faith without works is dead", but instead she said, "works without faith are dead". And it's true! Sometimes, when things go wrong, I work hard--trying to make up the difference through my own efforts. But the fact is, I can do my very best to change my circumstances, but the *only* one who can bring true and lasting change is our Savior. Our efforts must always be driven by our faith in Him. He must be the source of our strength. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." I'm really trying to trust more in Him. His plan is perfect.

This week, I went on an exchange to Gastonia, where we had a lesson scheduled with a Spanish Family. They spoke next to no English, and my companion spoke next to no Spanish. I thought of Hermana Funk as I tried to read the 1st Vision in Spanish (for the 1st time in my life!). Going forward, I'm definitely going to practice first, especially trying to pronounce the word "llamandome". :-)

During exchange, we went to see this man who lived *in the middle of nowhere*. As we drove, the road slowly turned from asphalt into gravel, and from gravel into dirt, until we were driving on what seemed like no more than a 4-wheeler trail. The Sister I was with encouraged me to keep driving, despite the tall weeds on either side and no end in site. Eventually, we saw *huge* potholes ahead, filled with mud. At that point, she finally decided that we should turn around. No worries, we avoided the ditch on one side and the wall of dirt on the other, and we still found the man's house!

The Lord really is looking out for us. We just need to trust Him more.

All my love,

Sister Larsen

This is Kyairah--love her!



This is the mustard seed band that we developed. The idea is that the center will be filled with transparent silicone and a mustard seed and we'd have the scripture relating to faith and the mustard seed.



1/20/15- The Return of “The Boy with the Shovel”

Dear Family,

It's been a good and bad week. The bad: a revivalist from Texas and his crew decided to stay another 45 days (a total of 52) teaching everyone how to be missionaries (things are going to get...interesting...4 against 400...Army of Helaman Status). The good: my new companion is a big ol' country kid/football player from South Jordan who seems willing to go to war with me against the revivalists (communists).

We got recruited to sing again, this time by a Sister in the ward whose sole purpose in life is to hook us up with her daughter. After a dinner appointment at her house last week she drove all the way back to our apartment to give Elder Van Haren her daughter's address. After we sang in Relief Society, the dinner calendar for this week is completely filled for the first time since I've been here. (Hooray!)

Finding efforts the past few weeks have been mostly futile. Everyone's already got Jesus. We've been looking into some service opportunities to reach the people that way and have had some cool experiences shoveling snow. One guy gave us hot chocolate. Another girl gave us kisses (come on now, we're talking about Hershey's!). Another individual wrote to the paper publicly thanking the “two young men from the Church of Jesus Christ who shoveled her drive”.

The coolest experience was knocking on a door and not thinking anyone was home. As we were walking away we saw the garage door opening. Elder Day told her who we were and what we were doing and she just started sobbing and through tears said “Would you please?” We did so and afterwards had a really good conversation with her. Turns out her husband passed away a few months ago and it's been super hard on her. We told her about the Plan of Salvation and gave her a pamphlet. I told her that loved ones who have passed on are really not very far from us. I told her that I had lost two grandpa's, one of them fairly recently and have since felt their presence in my life helping me along the way. Sometimes when we're out walking I can almost hear a third set of feet in the snow behind us.

One funny thing the Revive Indiana preacher dude said while he was talking about fasting for power. “Most people fast by not using their phones or social media. I guess you Amish folks can just fast from your generators or something...” Tell you what; it's a totally different world here. Lots of great people. Lots of strong families. We just need to find a way to reach them.

Anyway, know that I love you and pray for you. I've really been trying to make prayer more personal the past few weeks and know that they will be answered in God's own time and fashion.

Elder Larsen

1/19/15-Alexandriana Style!

Dear Family,

This week, my testimony has grown so much that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are real, and that they are so aware of us. We were blessed to have interviews with President Craven this week, and I felt like everything he said was Heavenly Father talking directly to me. Such a blessing!

We were doing a lot of finding this week, so I don't have much to report as far as teaching, so instead I wanted to share a few anecdotes that perfectly describe Alexandriana.

-On Sunday, our relief society president was trying to get class started, and, as usual, there was a lot of chatting. After a few failed attempts, I heard one of the Sisters yell something, but I didn't understand what she said. A moment later, she explained in a loud voice, "I *didn't* say 'shut up!' I just said 'be quiet' *really loud!*"

-There's one couple in the ward--the Hansen's--that I just love. We always seem to have adventures during dinner, though. A few weeks back, we practiced throwing watermelon chunks into each other's mouths. This last week Brother Hansen showed us how he can roll his eyes back in his head, and insisted that we each try. (By the way, don't try it--it gives you a headache :-)

-While we were meeting with Bishop, we learned that 40% of all serious crimes in Charlotte occur in our ward boundaries (don't worry, Mom :-). The Elders set a goal to have one Baptism to match every serious crime.....

This ward definitely has enough character to go around--I love it!

On a more spiritual note, this week I read a quote by Elder Holland that I LOVE. He says, "Jesus has chosen, even in a resurrected, otherwise perfected body, to retain for the benefit of His disciples the wounds in His hands and in His feet and in His side--signs, if you will, that painful things happen even to the pure and the perfect; signs, if you will, that pain in this world is not evidence that God doesn't love you; signs, if you will, that problems pass and happiness can be ours."

I'm so grateful for my Savior--for His example, and for the hope and peace He offers each of us. I know He lives!

All my love,

Sister Larsen

1/26/15-God Needs You



Well. The first full week of this transfer is over and was for the most part...uneventful.

Elder Day is a pretty good missionary...kind of goofy. He plays the guitar and the harmonica and likes to cook and to eat to laugh. So far so good.

I've almost met my match with this area when it comes to finding people to teach. *Everyone* already has a church. For the most part they know who we are and what we're doing and don't want anything to do with us. When we find someone we think has potential as an investigator we lose contact or they drop us. In over three months we've not found a single person that we've actively taught. Kind of frustrating.

The longer I've been out the more I realize that there is an extremely small number of people in this mission (probably in the country as well) who are actively looking for a church relative to the total population. I often wonder "This church has made more of a difference in my life than anything else. The knowledge I have of our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and their plan for us has brought me more peace and happiness than anything else. Why don't people listen?"

Looking at the scriptures and modern day examples I think we find the answer. We read in John 15:16

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

I don't think that Noah woke up one morning thinking "You know what, today I want to build a really big ship and put a bunch of animals into it and go sailing for 370 days." I don't think that Moses one day told Aaron "Hey man, let's go talk to Pharaoh and try to convince him to let our people go and totally wreck Egypt." I don't think that Paul all of a sudden decided that "I'm going to stop killing all these people and go throughout all the world risking life and limb to proclaim the very cause I'm fighting against." I highly doubt that Joseph Smith went into the woods that spring morning thinking "I really want to be called as the Prophet of the Restoration, translate the Book of Mormon, and give

everything I have and am for a church I currently know nothing about.” It’s simply not reasonable. Most everything we do in the church we do because God has called and chosen us, not because it’s something we want to do of ourselves.

I think that helping people see that-that God needs them in His Church even though they don’t really want to be-is very important. You may not want to talk in church or be the scoutmaster or go on splits with the missionaries, but God needs you to, and He stands ready to bless you. Exercise faith and do it.

May you all be blessed in doing so!

Elder Larsen



Sunset view at parking lot near our home



Anne Marie trying on Christine’s prom dress.

1/26/15-A Tale of Two Miracles

Dear Family,

Being a missionary is the best! This morning I was just cleaning and singing and felt so happy! There really can't be any greater joy than helping others feel the love of Jesus Christ.

We've been blessed this week with temperatures staying mostly in the 60's, apart from one cold, rainy day. The Sunshine has done a lot to increase our faith and our Spirits.

This week, Tameka decided to no longer meet with us, and we still haven't been able to get a hold of the Stewarts. Nonetheless, we continue to see miracles. One of those miracles is LeDonna.

We met LeDonna last Saturday while trying to find a less-active in an apartment building. We knocked most of the doors in the building, and although we never found the less-active, I think the Lord had other plans in mind. LeDonna was the very last door we knocked, and I feel like she has been prepared for the Gospel. She started learning about Christ just 3 or 4 years ago, and is still trying to find a Church. She has a 4-year-old son named Namion, and both of them attended Sacrament Meeting yesterday. LeDonna said she felt such peace. The topic for Sacrament meeting was about building a Christ-centered home, which is exactly what LeDonna needed!

Another miracle is Maria. We met her a few weeks ago while in downtown Charlotte. Maria doesn't speak any English, and so when she saw us, she acted out being baptized so we would know that she was a member of the Church. :-) This week, Sister Wadington (from Peru) came with us to teach Maria. I couldn't understand a word of what was said, but the Spirit was so strong as we read "El Libro De Mormon" with Maria. She hasn't been able to come to Church in years--because she is working to support her family--but her Spirit is still so strong. I was so touched by her humility and goodness.

The Spirit hit me hard this week with a lesson I've needed to learn for a long time. Sister Perez and I were headed to our dinner appointment, and we realized we would be 15-20 minutes early. The kids were outside playing basketball, and Sister Perez suggested that we go and play with them for a few minutes, while I felt we should go knock doors or make some phone calls. Of course, as missionaries, it's important to be diligent, but I realized that--even if I were at home--I don't know if I would've taken those couple of minutes to play basketball. And yet, it's those small, seemingly insignificant moments that do wonders to build relationships and help others know we love them. It seems like such a small lesson, but it was big to me. I recommitted myself then and there to always take advantage of those little moments. Life is too short to let them pass by, thinking we need to be doing "bigger and better things". Nothing could be better than spending time with those we love.

I love what President Uchtdorf says, "I think of our Lord and Exemplar, Jesus Christ, and His short life among the people of Galilee and Jerusalem. I have tried to imagine Him bustling between meetings or multitasking to get a list of urgent things accomplished. ***I can't see it.*** Instead, I see the compassionate and caring Son of God purposefully living each day. When He interacted with those around Him, they felt important and loved. He knew the infinite value of the people He met. He blessed them, ministered to them. He lifted them up, healed them. He gave them the precious gift of

His time."

This week, I hope you'll take advantage of those small moments with family and friends. I know they can make a world of difference!

I love you!

Sister Larsen



We've been testing out different Tyvek papers from China and South Korea to see which ones bleed and smear in water, which appear to be true Dupont Tyvek, which have the best die cut for the security strip, etc.

2/3/15-Amish Gone AWOL

Dear Family,

My apologies for not writing Monday...again. We had about 15 in. of snow dumped on us Sunday and everything was shut down. What happens then? We hit the road, or rather, shovel the roads...and then make a bunch of snow ice cream experiments...

I've had some questions about the Amish. They all live out in the country and travel by horse and buggy. The kids are all home-taught. They do not have a church building, but rather meet in different peoples' houses each week. They're a Christian people whose religion is based on non-resistance, or keeping the peace. They are a breed of Anabaptists, a group of people who started a movement in opposition to the Catholic church baptizing infants. People are baptized when they are adults (not quite sure the age). There are different kinds of Amish, some more conservative while others are more liberal. The Amish here are the Swish Amish originally from Pennsylvania. Women and girls wear white bonnets and plain dresses. Men wear button-up shirts and suspenders and brim hats and have beards. Of course they can't use technology except business land-lines for the men and sometimes generators for their homes. They don't really associate with what they called the "English" (everybody else in the community) and are engaged in mostly agriculture and livestock. How do I know this? Two Amish teenagers called me.

Monday evening the phone rings and I pick up. On the other end there's a girl with a heavy accent who asks me to tell her about the Church. After doing so she taught me how to say "God loves you" and "God loves you and me" in German. Then she tells me about her family, her older brother singing a song in "English" to the chickens out in the coop (which is against the rules), her recordings on the contraband tape recorder she had somehow gotten a hold of, and how her and her older brother had left the Amish faith several months previous. I asked her how many times she had used a telephone, and she replied "This is my second time." Holy cow. Talk about a blast from the past. The next day her brother called and played me a bunch of music he had recorded, including a somewhat offensive song about Brigham Young he thought we might appreciate...

They've called us several times and are wanting to come to church, and we gave them the contact information of a member in the ward who used to be Amish. The vision: they get baptized, their family joins the church, and then the entire Amish population joins and we have all the snow ice cream and chocolates and butters and pastries we could ever want! It's gonna' to be great!

More info. on the Elkhart Amish: <http://www.amishcountry.org/explore-the-area/area-history/amish-culture>

So there you go: all you ever wanted and didn't want to know.

Our investigator Bobbie is still chuggin' along. All she needs to do is stop smoking and come to church and she's golden. Rex is kind of falling off the face of the earth, but we'll see what happens. Other than that we have a chronic drunkard who entertains us every Thursday with his stories. "After I got shot in the head they pronounced me dead. I woke up in a morgue and sat up and asked the lady 'Could you please give me my clothes?'" Hey, he chose to follow Jesus Christ in the pre-mortal realm.

God has a plan for him just like all of us. He can change his ways. The desire is there, all he needs is the action.

Here's a scripture I came across in my studies this past week that I'd like to share with all of you in Alma 36 (Alma recounting the story of his conversion to Helaman):

24 Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

25 Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors;

My motivation in doing missionary work is just that: "that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did (and do) taste;" This work we are all involved in is incredible. It is the work of "making bad men good and good men better, and to change human nature." What a blessing it is to "Stand still and see the salvation of God" roll forth in all it's majesty and power.

Your Fellow Laborer in God's Vineyard,

Elder Larsen



View of the Wellsville's from the temporary dirt hill in the retirement community before all the construction started in again to the South.

2/2/15-Golf Season

Dear Family,

This has been a great week! The weather continues to be pretty nice, and the Lord is continually blessing us with people to teach.

About a month ago, we met a man named Miguel. He said that he had wanted his family to start going to Church, and that they would be there that Sunday. Well, they never came, and we forgot about Miguel.

But this week, we started teaching his whole family, and they came to Church!!! It is so fun teaching entire families. Miguel has a wife and 4 kids, and this week we taught them the restoration by playing a game of "telephone". The kids (ages 7, 12, 15, and 17) got really into it. The phrase started, "The first steps in the Gospel are: faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost" and ended, "The Holy Spirit is the greatest thing in the whole world." What??? " :-) We considered it a success when Eddie--the 12-year-old--said, "Can you come back again tomorrow?" They seemed to enjoy Church, and the boys knew some of the youth from their classes at school. Although they grew up catholic, none of them have been Baptized before, and we're hoping they will be baptized in February or March. We're so excited!!!

Yesterday we met another amazing individual--Jose. When we knocked on his door, he looked out and asked, "Who sent you?" As we started talking, we learned that he has a Mormon friend who has been inviting him to Church for months now. Why? Because Jose has read the Book of Mormon 3 TIMES. He loves to read, and several years ago, he found a Book of Mormon, sopping wet in a garbage can. He set it on a vent to dry, and--not really knowing what it was--began to read. He told us all about Nephi, Laman, Lemuel, and Alma. He reads the Book of Mormon as you would a novel, but we're excited to help him see the spiritual significance as well.

A funny moment from the week: We knocked on a door, and were invited in to talk with an older woman who is bedridden. We talked for a while, and--at the conclusion of our conversation--asked if we could leave her with a prayer. She was quite hard of hearing, and had no idea what we were saying. Her nephew came in and said loudly, "They want to PRAY for you. To God. Jesus." She looked up at us as if she finally understood and asked, "Oh. Golf Season?" Not quite :-)

This morning I was studying the difference between hoping, believing, and knowing that something is true. I think sometimes we doubt ourselves or our testimonies because we don't **KNOW** that something is true. I was deeply touched, however, as I read about the power of belief. Christ counsels us over and over again, "Be not afraid, only Believe" (Mark 5:36). "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Don't be hard on yourself if you "only believe". That is all Christ asks of us--to have faith enough to follow Him. If we will live the Gospel--letting our belief turn to action, we will see Christ work miracles in our lives. That is His promise.

I know that Christ lives, and that He loves us. I know that He is aware of us, every day of our lives, and that He is there to lift and to inspire and to bless. How grateful I am to testify every day of Him.

All my love,

Sister Larsen

2/9/15-“Mine angels roundabout you, to bear you up.”

On a mission, you experience extremes: being overjoyed and totally dejected, succeeding phenomenally and failing miserably, having Christlike love for others and wanting to throw your companion into a volcano. It's an experience unlike any other. Sometimes we get beaten down and wonder why it seems like God has forsaken us. I think this quote answers the question very well.

“My dear elders and sisters, I pray that on your mission you will have many moments of complete and overwhelming and even anguishing desperation. Why? Because then, and only then, will you desperately ask, desperately seek and desperately knock. Then, and only then, will you find the courage and determination to follow through with exactness everything the Lord needs you to do in order to serve a valiant vibrant, worthy and very successful mission for Him.” Sister Nelson

It's the same with life. God lets us become prideful and try to do it all on our own and we end up getting licked. Then with His perfect patience and love He asks “Are you done yet?” We look up with haggard faces and crack a smile, knowing it's time to turn it over to Him.

The story of Alma preaching to the people of Ammonihah is a perfect example of example of how we all feel after having done our very best and not succeeded and how the Lord steps in and picks us back up.

“Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city, he departed thence and took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron. And it came to pass that while he was journeying thither, being weighed down with sorrow, wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul, because of the wickedness of the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass while Alma was thus weighed down with sorrow, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying: Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you. And behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent the Lord God will destroy them. For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, (for thus saith the Lord) which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments which he has given unto his people.” (Alma 8:13-17)

This is a sanctifying process that happens to everyone at some stage in their life, and for some (like me), many times. It is not something we should fear, but look forward to. God stands ready to extend his arm of mercy to us when we lose the faith we started out with and start to sink into the waters of fear like Peter. Turn your heart over to him by the prayer of faith and by following his commandments.

I'm sorry if this email seems like kind of a downer. I felt like it will be of benefit to someone who reads it. I promise I'm doing just fine. Larsens, Bensons, Johnsons, and friends don't give up. Life is

good. We are so very blessed every day. God lets us struggle because he loves us but will provide a way for us to get through.

“Therefore, let no man among you, for this commandment is unto all the faithful who are called of God in the church unto the ministry, from this hour take purse or scrip, that goeth forth to proclaim this gospel of the kingdom. Behold, I send you out to reprove the world of all their unrighteous deeds, and to teach them of a judgment which is to come. And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.” (D&C 84:86-88)

You are in my thoughts and prayers.

Elder Larsen



Anne Marie's 13th Birthday party with Sara Poppleton, Calyssa Kunzler, Megan Newbold, Shara Mackleprang, and Elizabeth Atkitson

2/9/15-Leave it all in the Field

Dear Family,

This has been a wonderful week! The Contreras family made it to Church again, as well as the sweetest woman we're teaching named Angela. We're striving to work more with the members, the work is moving along, and life is good.

I received some great advice from a friend last week that I wanted to share. Her counsel was to "leave it all in the field". She talked about how home will always be there, and our family and friends will always be there, but we only have the people and the opportunities on our missions for a short time. I've been thinking a lot about that counsel, and I think it applies to our lives as well.

Before we came to earth, we were SO EXCITED for the opportunities we would have here. We were so excited to receive bodies and to learn and to grow. But now we're here, and it can be easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day routine, or to feel discouraged when trials come our way. But each of us--missionaries or not--need to "leave it all in the field". This is our one chance at this life! Our one chance to gain experience and to love others and to give our heart to the Lord. I love what Sister Hinckley says on this subject:

"I don't want to drive up to the pearly gates in a shiny sports car, wearing beautifully tailored clothes, my hair expertly coiffed, and with long, perfectly manicured fingernails. I want to drive up in a station wagon that has mud on the wheels from taking kids to scout camp. I want to be there with a smudge of peanut butter on my shirt from making sandwiches for a sick neighbor's children. I want to be there with a little dirt under my fingernails from helping to weed someone's garden. I want to be there with children's sticky kisses on my cheeks and the tears of a friend on my shoulder. I want the Lord to know I was really here and that I really lived."

I am doing my best to take that advice to heart, to give the Lord all of my "heart, might, mind and strength". I hope each of you will strive to do the same--whatever your present trials or responsibilities. I know that as we give our very best, relying on our Savior, we will be able to say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

I love you all! Keep the faith!

~Sister Larsen

2/18/15-Changed by the Spirit

Once again, I'm sorry to keep you waiting. We had another snow storm over the weekend that shut everything down and caused all sorts of power outages and accidents.

Hope everyone had an enjoyable Valentine's day. I wrestled my Valentine Elder Day Saturday night. Neither of us could pin the other. He's too big and I'm too fast. I ended up with rug burns on both elbows and knees. Bad idea. Don't do that.

We had some cool experiences in the past week that I know came as the result of all of your prayers. Friday in particular was particularly graceful. Thursday night we were looking at our empty planners for the next day knowing it was going to be miserably cold. Tracting for five hours, why not? The next morning we hadn't been out for very long when we knocked into a lady who looked at us and said "Wait, are you guys the Mormons? Come on in!" She ended up being a long-time friend of a family in the ward and was very happy to talk to us. She volunteered to feed us lunch and will be eating with us again today and doing family history.

After lunch we had planned on meeting a MIA member we found sometime ago at the library to do family history. We called and she told us that she was actually moving that afternoon. So we volunteer to help her out. She's a single lady so we couldn't ride in the car with her. While she went out to her storage shed we tracted her neighborhood. We knocked on a door ...waited ...knocked again...waited...and then a semi-attractive young lady (I've been stuck with other dudes 24/7 for the past eight months) came around the side of the house and invited us in. She told us about a dream she and her brother had concurrently and then explained that her family was looking for a church. We shared our purpose and she and her husband replied that they had actually been talking about getting baptized the previous night. We'll be meeting with them next week sometime.

Two families. Both have Christian backgrounds, houses, jobs, cars, and are accountable. Doesn't happen very often. Thanks for your faith and prayers.

Thought I'd share something I've learned in my studies this past week. The place...the same prison King Limhi has imprisoned Ammon before he became the king's servant. The people...Nephi and Lehi (missionaries). The situation...they are about to be taken out of prison to be killed by Lamanites and Nephite dissenters when they are encircled by fire and the ground trembles three times followed by the voice of the Spirit each time commanding the people to repent.

"And it came to pass that the Lamanites said unto him: What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us? And Aminadab said unto them: You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you. And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed. And it came to pass that when they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire. An

d Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not, neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words. And it came to pass that there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying: Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world. And now, when they heard this they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them.” (Helaman 5:40-48)

What should we do when we need faith? Recognize your weaknesses and pray sincerely. You will be filled with and changed by the Spirit.

May you all be blessed in doing so.

Sending My Love,

Elder Larsen



Let the building begin! 90 new homes going in next to our home. ☺

2/16/15-Smoke Alarms and Small and Simple Things

Hello Family!

I hope you've had a wonderful week! This week we've had a lot of fun opportunities--especially with Valentine's day. We planned a booth in downtown Charlotte with the Elders in our ward. As we walked toward the street corner with our table, we were disappointed to see that another Church was already staked out. But wait! They were familiar faces :-). Some other missionaries had the same idea, so we ended up combining our efforts and had a great time street-contacting people. We let people write on paper hearts what they loved about their family or about God. We then spent the evening heart-attacking ward members. It was great!

The Contreras Family is doing well. The mother--Jessica--sat in for the first time, which we are really excited about! Her husband Miguel said that she still considers herself "very catholic", but we brought her a Spanish Book of Mormon this week, and she seemed excited, so we're making progress.

We also started teaching a 15-year-old named Catharine this week. You probably remember me talking about the sweet woman Valerie who passed away in December? Catharine is her daughter. Cat has been going to YW for several months, and the YW leaders have really helped her through her Mom's passing. Although she never really considered joining the Church in the past, she feels like the YW's kindness is a sign from God that she needs to learn for herself. She's started reading the Book of Mormon daily and asking all sorts of great questions!

We had a funny moment with Cat. It's tradition that when the missionaries come over they make cookies and kool-aid. Well, the kool-aid was alright, but the cookies were a little dark on the bottom. When we arrived, the smoke alarm went off, and wouldn't stop unless Cat continually fanned it with a pillow. I told Sister Perez that I would teach, and she could keep fanning it throughout the lesson....but we ended up opening the windows instead. It was alright--just 32 degrees outside :-). At least the alarm quit!

This week in zone meeting we had the opportunity to train on developing Christlike Characteristics. Becoming like Christ is a wonderful process, but it can be overwhelming at times! It's comforting to know that "out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33). I'm trying to do the little things, and trust in the Lord to help me become better. President Craven said recently, "We don't become great by doing great things. We become great by doing the small and simple things consistently." So choose one thing you'd like to change, and I know the Savior will help you.

I love you all so much! I'm so grateful to be here in North Carolina; learning and growing every day. Have a wonderful week!

Sister Larsen





Jared, Heath, Owen, and Landon Win State Excellence and earn a spot in Nationals and Worlds Vex Competition



Jared Performing at Orchestra Concert



Anne Marie as nun in Sound of Music



**Anne Marie with Grandma
Benson/Larsen at Sound of Music**

2/23/15-Leaving Goshen



Hello Everyone!

This is the story of my life. This picture tells you everything you need to know about Hoosiers. The guy on the right's Leonard. He's a disabled vet who drinks like a fish. His wife Veera stands in the middle. Most of the time when we're over she's yelling at Leonard to keep the lesson moving along and not get distracted. And then there's me.

Wednesday I'll be leaving these good folks as well as many others who have made my experience in Goshen. It's been a very interesting 4 1/2 months in the area. I've learned a lot and have grown a lot and am grateful for my assignment here. "I don't know where I'm going...not sure where I've been."

I think a lot of times life is like climbing up a mountain. While on the dusty trail drenched in sweat and covered in dirt, we ask ourselves "I signed up for this?" Then there are those times when we stop out of desperation and fatigue, sit down, look back, and realize how far we've come. Bruce R. McConkie uses this same analogy talking about the history of the church:

"We stand today on a mountain peak, on a majestic, glorious peak in the midst of the mountains of Israel. To gain this height, we have climbed over peaks of peace and trudged through the valleys of despair. Below us lie the deserts of sin and the forests of evil; below us stretch the swamps of carnality and the plains of passion; below us rage the roaring rivers of war and hate and crime, through all of which we have struggled to reach this summit. Above us, stretching crest on crest, are yet greater and grander peaks. There are deep canyons and steep precipices. Looking back with pride, we see the spring of 1820 when the Gods of heaven, the supreme rulers of the universe, rent the heavens, appeared to Joseph Smith and ushered in the dispensation of the fulness of times. We see Moroni flying through the midst of heaven, sounding the trump of God, and revealing the book which whispers from the dust with a familiar spirit. We see other angelic ministrants come, bringing keys and powers and authorities until all of the keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth. We see the little stone cut from the mountain without hands beginning to roll forth toward that coming day when it shall smite the Babylonian image, break in pieces the kingdoms of men, and fill the whole earth. We see the elders of the kingdom going forth to many nations, crying repentance, g



athering Israel, and assembling the faithful in the tops of the mountains where stands the house of the Lord. We see converts and stakes and temples. Gifts and signs and miracles abound. The sick are healed and the dead are raised by the power of God, and the work of the Lord goes forward."

Focusing on how far you've come instead of how far you have to go provides the motivation to keep going forward.

I don't know what effect I had on this area, and will probably never know. I will say that I gave it my all. I went hard each day in the hopes that we were making a difference. I've poured out my soul in prayer to God in behalf of these people, I've done my very best to love and to serve them, and hope the Lord will accept the sacrifices we've made. I love you all dearly and hope and pray that you are finding happiness in living the Gospel as families.

Love to all!

Elder Larsen



Temple Trip with Christine and Anne Marie

2/23/15-Take me Home, Country Roads

Dear Family,

Well, transfers came and went this week, and I'm back in the country! I'm now serving in an area called Newton-Conover. It's two small towns in the northwest part of the state. I had the chance to attend Church on Sunday, and I kept singing to myself, "I think I'm gonna' like it here!" :-). Most people were born and raised here, and have stayed their whole lives, raised their own families here, etc. Every single member I met on Sunday was a convert to the Church, except for one couple. Pretty incredible. Because of that, everyone here is super missionary minded. It's great!



I'm serving with Sister Merrill, who is also from Cache Valley. We've already become great friends, and have hit the ground running!

I wanted to share the story of one man we are teaching: Ted. Ted went to Church as a child, but it was always really hard for him to believe the stories in the Bible. Each time we go over, he retells the story, "I just couldn't believe that *agrown adult* was telling me that Noah took two of *every animal*, and fit them all in a boat! Could that *really happen*?" Because those stories were

hard to believe, Ted struggled to believe in God. When the Sisters knocked on his door, however, he was impressed by the plausibility of the Book of Mormon, and the Sisters started to teach him.

(Jody and Klea--2 of the sweetest LA Sisters I've been blessed to teach.)

He has been praying over the last several weeks, and the biggest question he's been asking is if God is really there. After offering this prayer for several days, Ted had a miracle of his own. He was sitting in his lounge chair in his living room--across from a bookshelf--where he has sat for years and years. One day, as he got off the phone with the Sisters, he noticed a light blue book on the shelf--one he had never noticed before. He went and picked it up, and noticed that there was a gold statue on the front, and the title said, "The Book of Mormon". Even more incredible was a note inside the front cover, addressed to Ted's Dad, who passed away several years ago. It was from a man named Brother Schoonover, who bore his testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Well, it turns out that this same Brother Schoonover still attends the Newton-Conover ward, and had worked with Ted's father over 25 years ago. They had become good friends, and Brother Schoonover had given him a Book of Mormon. It had sat on the bookshelf for years and years, but Ted never found it until he started meeting with the Sisters. Ted recognized this as an answer to his prayers--Heavenly Father has definitely been listening.

It really touched me that Heavenly Father knew exactly what Ted needed to feel that He was there. I know that Heavenly Father is equally aware of each of us, and wants to give all of us real, personal answers. All He asks is that we sincerely ask, seek, and knock. I know that we are each His children, and that He loves us infinitely. I hope we'll each invite Him more into the details of our lives.



Catharine and Brother O'Brien--I love them!

I love y'all so much! I know that God lives.

Sister Larsen



Bowling at Jared's Birthday Party

3/2/15-You'll Like Linton

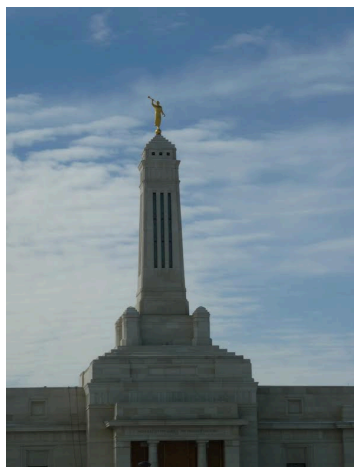


Dear Family,

I hope you are all doing well. From the letters I've received it sounds like you are.

I'm now serving in what many consider "banishment" with Elder Anderson from Orem. We are located five hours to the south and west of Goshen in a dying town called Sullivan and are responsible for it and several surrounding cities in the Linton area. People living here are all related to each other in one way or another and come from multi-generational families in the area of poor coal miners. They've all been

very friendly so far (knock on wood). We're thirty minutes from the nearest Elders. Of course, whenever I even think of complaining, I can say to myself "Hey, at least I'm not in Yellowknife..." 😊
Love you Elder Bennion!



No, it's really not that bad. The ward here is super tight with missionaries and have absolutely no reservations. You should have *seen* the young women playing Pictionary. The people are great.

Elder Anderson and I are a lot alike. Sometimes it's kind of scary. He's been out for 20 months and is a swimmer and a runner and a tent-pole warrior. So far he seems like a pretty solid missionary. He's more laid back than me, but I'm very used to that.

As to the work, there's on lady who's scheduled to be baptized the second week of April. There are a few part-member families and other investigators on the radar. I'm committed to knock on the fewest doors possible. The next six weeks will be filled with service and family history.

The longer I serve the more I've been coming to realize that people don't want you to tell them you're Christian, they want you to *show them*. Ammon provides a great example for all of us:

"And the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people. And Ammon said unto him: Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die. And it came to pass that king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, and caused that his bands should be loosed; and he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife. But Ammon said unto him: Nay, but I will be thy servant. Therefore Ammon became a servant to king Lamoni." (Alma 17:22-25)

Actions speak much louder than words. If you want to open doors you must first open hearts. Love them, and it will be nearly impossible for them to hate you. Serve that home teaching family that won't give you the time of day or that counselor of yours who won't do their job. Your example will inspire them and they are likely to react positively.

I'm excited for the time I have to love the people here. We're going to work hard. And we're going to see miracles.

Love to all!
Elder Larsen

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Larsen,

You have a great son here in Indiana! He and Elder Van Horen knocked on my door one evening after dark and they almost got away before I got my door opened. Because I'm a widow, we stood out in the freezing cold to talk. Poor Elder Van Horen --- he hates cold weather.

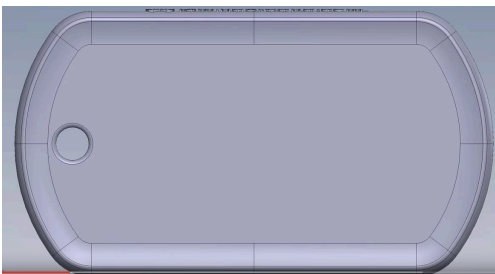
I'm an ex-Mormon who loves kids who are my grandchildren's ages. I have twelve grandchildren --- the youngest will be three this year. The oldest will be twenty-three in the fall.

Are you in Clarkston? I forgot. I only remember for certain that you're north of Salt Lake.

Here's a pic I took:



Elder Day is also from Utah.



Dog Tag we are developing at Reminderband



Christine at Orchestra Concert

3/2/15-Freezing Rain

Dear Family,

It's been a really good week! We had a lot of member involvement this week, and were gearing up to have several investigators at Church until....they cancelled our meetings due to freezing rain. The rain was only "freezing" for about 1/2 hour, and the roads weren't slick at all, but the people here in North Carolina take inclement weather very seriously. :-) Luckily we were still able to attend Church in Hickory (about 1/2 hour away). Now that it's March, we should be pretty safe for next Sunday.

We are teaching the sweetest lady named Caleata--I love her. During a lesson this week, a member started to explain how she had been baptized once, but that she needed to get baptized again by the proper authority. In Caleata's closing prayer, she said, "Lord, I didn't know I hadn't been baptized...but we'll get to that later...I'm excited to be baptized!"

We're still teaching Ted. He is such a good, good man. He's already listened to 3 or 4 of the Book of Mormon CD's, and praying each day. He is just hesitant to come to Church "until God tells him it's time". If you could include him in your prayers, I know it would help him a lot!

We had a really sweet experience yesterday that reminded me how much the Lord cares about us. We were driving out in the country, trying to find the home of a less-active member, Sister Rathbone. As we drove, I felt a strong prompting that we should visit a certain house after we found Sister Rathbone. As we continued driving, we couldn't find the right house--the house number didn't exist! We realized that we had entered the address incorrectly into our GPS, and the house I felt prompted to visit was actually her house! Sister Rathbone was very open, and said she feels like she needs to come back to Church. This is the first time she's talked with anyone from the Church in over 10 years!

It just amazes me how the Lord helps us with the smallest things in our lives. It's truly incredible--and humbling--how much He cares about us. He's aware of Ted, and of Sister Rathbone, and of Sister Merrill and I, and I know He's aware of you! He wants to help each of us, we just need to reach out to Him.

I love y'all so much!

~Sister Larsen

Sister Merrill--so grateful for her!





Hi!

I live in Hickory, NC and these sweet Sisters, Sister Larsen and Sister Merrill, from Newton-Conover ward were visiting our ward today because there was something wrong with their building. They both passed along a message that they are doing great, that they are happy and that they love you. They are both from Logan, Utah! Small world. I hope that you get this picture!

Rebecca Leming



Anne Marie as nun in Sound of Music (second row and two from left)



Figure 1 - Christine and Nate Siebers at Sweetheart Ball 2015

3/9/15-Spring is Approaching!

Hello there!

Spring is approaching! I can't remember ever being so excited for warm temperatures and *green*!

Things are going well. We've really gotten out and met a lot of the members here. Still haven't been to church because stake conference was cancelled the first week and held yesterday. Those we have met have been very welcoming.

Does anyone know anything about the band "Union Gap"? I guess they were on the Ed Sullivan Show the week after Rolling Stones? We met the drummer (who is from Sullivan) and had a good talk with him about the "good ol' days".

We finally met our investigator Marsha. She's got quite the life history-was a cheerleader in high school, has been married three times, has been thrown in jail for false charges...twice. She's really great. She gave us a tour of the town. You know how you hear about those places where everybody knows everybody. Yeah...that's Sullivan. Literally. She insists on calling us by our first names and giving us hugs before we leave. What do you do? I don't think she'll get baptized anytime soon. I guess she really likes having a boyfriend.

Another family we've been working with is the Coombs. She's a member from California. He's a military vet from here who is not. We talked about modern-day prophets and invited him to be baptized after praying to know if they exist. He's a little iffy, but we'll have to see.

Thursday was an adventure. We went to a town called Carlisle south of Sullivan to meet a bunch of members. We got fed lunch...twice. A member took us out to a Chinese buffet that night and afterwards we had dinner with a part-member family the Eichner's. The son and daughter-in-law were recently baptized in Florida and moved here about a month ago. Super cool. Super pumped about going to the temple. I'm really looking forward to continuing to work with them.

A cool thought from stake conference: the Stake President spoke about meeting with a seventy, the temple president, the mission president, and some other stake presidents in Carmel about the Indianapolis temple. The seventy explained to them that in the months leading up to a temple dedication, all Hell will be let loose. The construction of the temple has been delayed for quite some time and there will likely be more opposition in the weeks and months ahead. But once it is dedicated I feel that Satan's grasp on this state will be significantly reduced and that the Spirit will increase dramatically. I'm really excited.

I'll leave you with a scripture:

Ether 12:4

"Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God."

Believe in God. He believes in you!

Sending my love,

Elder Larsen

I would've included this in my regular email, but it was getting kinda long. We're helping out with a group called "Brown Baggers". Some members in the ward named the Brewers adopted a girl several years ago, and after hearing her story about having to dig through the dumpster to stay alive started up a nonprofit to provide meals for kids who go hungry. They buy food and make up sack lunches for kids to take home on the weekends. I guess there are quite a few who don't get any food outside school since this is the poorest county in Indiana. Kind of a cool project.



Figure 2 - We got our 3D printer at work and printed this Octopus! :-)

3/9/15-Wal-Mart isn't the only Saving Place!

Dear Family,

We are teaching such sweet, good people! Each of them is facing some sort of concern right now, and so I would love it if you could pray for them.

Caleata is as sweet as ever. This week we taught her about the blessings of baptism. She said several times, "I am so excited to be baptized! When did you say I could get baptized?" She said she wanted to stop smoking first, and wondered what other things she would need to do. We taught her about the Law of Chastity, and--although she wants to live it--she has no where to live but with her boyfriend. We know that the Lord will provide a way for her if she takes those steps of faith.

Madeline got the stomach flu this weekend, which prevented her from coming to Church. She also read the verse in the Book of Mormon about the Lamanites getting "a skin of blackness", and she felt that was a sign that she was no longer supposed to read from the Book of Mormon. We talked it through with her, and she was a little more open. Please pray for her!

Ted continues to listen faithfully to the Book of Mormon on CD, but continues to be very hesitant about coming to Church. We are going to be watching the video of the Restoration with him tomorrow, though, and that is always very powerful.

The best news of this week, however, is that CATHARINE O'BRIEN IS GETTING BAPTIZED!!! I guess she just received her answer that the Book of Mormon was true, and figured, 'why wait?' She's getting baptized this Sunday--I am so, so happy for her!



This week I was reading the talk "The Miracle of a Mission" by Elder Holland. I was so touched by the things he shared, and right then and there I recommitted to give my very best.

One thought I especially loved: "You will succeed in this work. You will succeed at this work because it is God's to do...He'll do the work and He'll give you the words to say and the language to say it and the testimony to bear and the places to go and the doors to knock on and the people to inquire of on the street. He'll do all of that if you will pledge to live by the Spirit and be obedient and testify by the Holy Ghost and do the work His way."

I trust in that promise. And I know that promise stands not only for missionaries, but for all of us, because we are God's children. If we obey God's commandments and follow His Spirit, we have His promise that He will guide us throughout our lives. I am so grateful for that guidance.

Sure love y'all!

Sister Larsen

3/16/15-The Fiery Darts of the Adversary



On the Banks of the Wabash

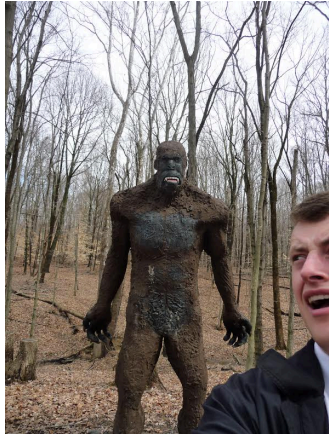
Greetings!

It's been quite the week. A lot has gone down and I hope that the following can make at least some sense.

We finally got to meet our investigator Kris Mahurin. She's the nonmember in a part-member family. Her husband is a retired member of the LAPD who had his legs amputated after being shot and getting lead poisoning. He's a very loud, spontaneous, funny guy. As we're talking we ask him about a compound bow leaning against the hearth. He challenges Elder Anderson to pull the string back and lock it. After doing so we all realize (now that it's cocked and ready to shoot, we can't dry fire it; we're going to have to shoot it). One of their twin sons comes out from a back room, sticks an aluminum arrow in the crossbow, and Brother Mahurin says "Elder Anderson, you may want to move." He gets out of the Lazy Boy he's sitting in and Brother Mahurin says "Son, shoot the chair." Without a moment's hesitation his son pulls the trigger and the arrow flies right through the chair and into the electrical outlet. We probably should have died. Maybe we should fear the Mahurin's compound bow more than what Satan shoots at us...

We were walking down the street back to our apartment and I see this guy doing something in the bed of his truck while listening to some hard rock. In my head I say "We'll just let him be." As we kept walking I kept getting the impression to turn back and talk to him. I finally stop and say "Elder Anderson. I'm not going to be able to sleep tonight if we don't talk to that guy." "Ok." We ended up helping him plant some seeds while explaining the Restoration.

We live right next to the tracks and enjoy vibrating beds each night. Almost every time we've walked across the tracks we've gotten yelled at by some people in cars passing by. Elder Anderson tells me "You know, I think that's our neighbors." "Great..." One morning they're outside and signal to us to come over to talk to them. In my head I had an image of how things might turn out:



When a contact goes bad...

We ended up playing catch with them and learn that they investigated the church many years ago. Pretty cool.

So we've been told that we've been given permission to have sacrament meeting here for all the members in this area so we don't have to travel so far to church. We just need a building to meet in. We found this one place and I called the number. The guy turned out to be a former investigator who had lost contact with the missionaries. "To tell you the truth I've read the Book of Mormon and believe in Mormonism. I'll come to your meetings. I'll even pay for the first two times you meet there." Wow. That was awesome. Hopefully it works out!

One more experience: We called to volunteer at a local rest home and they told us we could give a devotional Sunday (yesterday). We got a hold of two members who are in a Gospel/Country band to come play guitars and sing. We get there and no one was in the chapel. I talk to the nurses and a while later we had five or six residents show up. I thought to myself "This is just great; we drag these brethren all the way out here on a Sunday afternoon for nothing." Then a thought came to me: "So you're telling me that making a difference in these few peoples' lives isn't worth it?" I was humbled. The one is *always* worth it.

A quote to leave you with:

“Those who are filled with the love of Christ do not seek to force others to do better; they inspire others to do better.” –Howard W. Hunter

This work is not a process of coercion. It is a labor of love-one person at a time.

Elder Larsen

3/16/15-"Too Blessed to be Depressed"

Dear Family,

Life is good. The biggest news of this week was that Ted made it to Church!!! We had a miracle lesson Tuesday night in a member's home watching "The Restoration". The Spirit was so strong, and Ted said that if he knew these things were true, he would be baptized at the end of March.

He arrived on Sunday looking spiffy in his suit. It was really sweet--he didn't know how to tie his tie, but he brought one anyways and asked a member to help him. He is such a good man! He's still striving to receive his answer that God is there, and that this is Christ's Church, but we know he will get there. Thank you for praying for him!

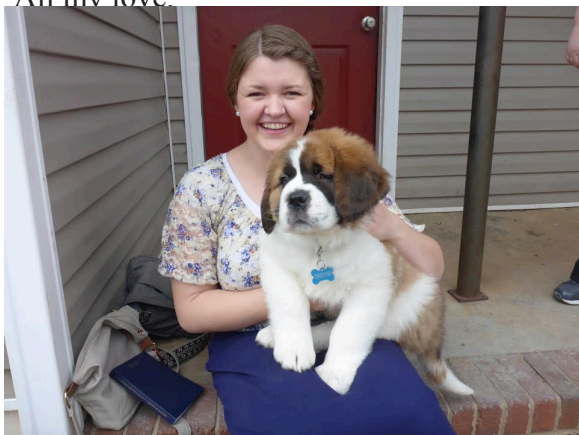
We did a lot of finding this week....a lot of finding. We're trying to think of ways to work "smarter, not harder" so we can use the Lord's time most effectively. Our teaching pool is pretty small, but we just started teaching a great man named Mike! We felt prompted to talk to him a couple weeks ago while we were finding in an apartment complex. He talked to us for a good 20 minutes, even though it was dark and he was carrying all of his laundry. When we went back to see him this week, he was already finished with 1st Nephi, had read the restoration pamphlet, and talked to us about the apostasy--almost word for word how we teach it! We're excited to continue teaching him.

This week we asked a YW named Idalis to come and teach Ted with us. She called us right before the appointment, and asked if it would be okay if her Grandpa and non-member friend came along too. It was such a strange situation, and we had no idea what to say...so we said yes! Luckily her Grandpa decided to wait in the car so we didn't completely overwhelm Ted....so strange!

This week I've been thinking a lot about repentance. It's amazing that repentance isn't just to help us overcome sins, but that it is there to help us overcome all of our weaknesses and shortcomings. The longer I've been on my mission, the more I've realized my weaknesses, but I'm learning that if we are realizing more of our weaknesses, it simply means that we are coming closer to God. Don't let your weaknesses overwhelm you--rely on the Lord, and He will help them become strengths.

I know this Gospel is true. I know that Christ lives and loves us, and is always there to help us change.

All my love,



Bruno's Little Brother!

3/23/15-Defenders of the Family

Dear Family,

It's been a slower week when it comes to the work. We've been doing a lot of service and have given many blessings. We've had some really eye-opening conversations and experiences with a lot of people that have got me thinking about a lot of things. One of them is the family.

Satan has scored some huge victories in in the continual struggle of families. Nationwide divorce is viewed as something that you can expect to experience at least once in your life. According to the American Psychological Association 40-50% of married couples in the United States divorce. The divorce rate for subsequent marriages is even higher. Each year more than three million kids in the U.S. are abused. That statistic is probably a lot higher. In today's society those who uphold the roles of "father" and "mother" are oftentimes looked down upon.

What is to be done? Seven steps from a 2012 New Era Article provide some answers.

1. Put Family First (every time)
2. Strengthen Your Family Members (serve one another)
3. Be an Example of Good Family Life (to your family and friends)
4. Stand Up for the Family in Your Conversations
5. Beware of how the Media Defines Families
6. Do Temple Work ("turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers" with those who have passed on and especially with your immediate family)
7. Develop Habits that You Want in Your Family (take the lead in prayer, scripture study, and church attendance)

Do your part to stop the "disintegration of the family [that have and will] will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets." Just because this is the way things are doesn't mean this is the way things have to be. We have been called to "overcome the world" and help others to do so.

The end goal of everything we do is to have families sealed together in the holy temples God so graciously continues to provide for us.

We ran into a couple of these "defenders of the family", not members of the Church, but great people who happen to live just down the street. They are an older couple living in an older house next to the tracks that has become the home of many of the neighborhood kids whose situations are less than desirable. While we visited with her they were coming in and out the front door. After a while he walked in and they introduced these kids to us as if they were showing off their most prized possessions. I can't tell you how much their love and tenderness impressed me. Their dedication to each other was obvious the moment they saw each other. The Spirit was in that home.

I feel so blessed to be part of such a strong family. I thank you all for your incredible examples to me of people who love God and their families and who have and continue to give all of themselves to do so. May the Lord bless all of you in doing so.

Elder Larsen

3/23/15-Boone Sisters and the Blue Ridge Mountains

Dear Family,

Where to start....so much happened this week! One of the biggest blessings was getting to interact a lot with the Cravens. We saw them at zone conference, at mission conference, at MLC, at a missionary fireside, and then they came teaching with us! I am so grateful for them.

This week we went on exchange with the Boone Sisters. As we drove up, I had the chance to see part of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They are absolutely *stunning*. Although smaller than the mountains out west, they extend for miles and miles--clear until the horizon. It was wonderful, after not seeing mountains my entire mission! The Sisters work primarily on the Appalachian State University Campus. It was really interesting to be surrounded by college kids, trying to talk to them on the bus, as they walked to class, etc. It was so different than what I'm used to, but so much fun!

We taught Mike again this week. He's a little hesitant to come to Church (he hasn't been since high school) but still, he is so prepared! We invited him to be baptized, and he wondered why, since he has been baptized in the past. When asked what he thought, he replied, "Well, if the 3 original apostles came down and gave God's authority to Joseph, and you're saying that authority is still on earth today, I guess you're inviting me to be baptized by that authority." I have *never* seen anyone understand so clearly.

We're also teaching the sweetest part-member family. The Mom is a member, but her husband and 8-year-old girls are not. The girls are named Sarah and Michelle, and they're identical twins. They are *so sweet*. They always dress exactly the same, and talk in the same little southern drawl. The other night, they watched the "Lamb of God" as a family, and Sarah felt the Spirit really strong. She told her Mom that she thought she'd been "saved". So, so sweet! We're hoping they'll be baptized with their Dad in April. Pray that he (Jason) will have the strength to stop smoking!

One night this week, we were on the phone with Ted. Before we hung up, he said, "Wait! I want to tell you one more thing. Something you don't know about me." That seemed pretty normal. He went on to say in a slow, dramatic voice, "I was born on the 6th day, during the 6th month, at midnight. It was the 6th full moon of the year, and it was a blood moon". At this point we were looking at each other like *what on earth???* He went on to say, "I even have a birth mark on my neck to prove it. It says 6-6-6". He paused dramatically and then said, "Ahhh, I'm just playin'. I wanted to make y'all laugh". Oh, Ted!

For mission conference this week, Elder Kopischke of the 70 came to speak to us. My favorite thing he taught us was about vision. He said, "Don't ever bury your dreams. Once you bury your dreams, you are dead as a missionary." I'm realizing how true that is. True faith is being able to visualize people being baptized and later sealed in the Temple....seeing others as they may become. In the same way, we have to have a vision for ourselves, for our lives, for our families. It gives us something to dream about and work toward and strive for. The scriptures teach us that "when there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). On the other hand, when we have vision, we *flourish*. I know that is true. I hope each of you have a vision for yourselves--when we do, we invite God's power into our lives.

I know that our Heavenly Father loves us, and will help us become our best selves as we rely on Him.

All my love,
Sister Larsen

3/30/15-The Temple

Hello,

We've had an enjoyable week. "Slow and steady, steady and slow, that's the way this area goes!"

Lots of interaction with members. We had a good heart to heart with Marsha Kennedy about her spiritual progression in the Gospel. I think the more we meet with her the more she's warming up to the idea of getting baptized.

The highlight of the week by far was going to the Louisville Temple. The spirit of that sacred edifice is unlike anything you feel anywhere else. It's the one place where you are totally free from the influence of the Adversary. As I sat in the Celestial Room I couldn't help but think "Wouldn't it be nice to sit here forever?" The cool thing is that we will if we live worthy, and we'll have our family with us.



We get transfer calls next Sunday. My thoughts are that either Elder Anderson leaves or we both stay another. Guess we'll have to see!

Hoping you all have a very enjoyable Easter remembering that glorious resurrection morn where Jesus rose triumphant from the earthly tomb, breaking the bands of death and setting all of us free if we will but exercise faith in him.

With Love,

Elder Larsen



Figure 3 - Me with Elder Alvarado at Spain, Barcelona Mission Reunion

3/30/15-The Cook Family

Dear Family,

Life is oh so good. I'm really sad to lose Sister Merrill tomorrow, but I'm excited for her to see her family, and I'm excited to meet my new companion! Missions are full of change, but I think that's why they help *us* change so much!

The sweetest moments of the week were with the Cook Family. We were able to eat dinner with them on Sunday, and the kids said some of the cutest things.

Daniel (in the middle) told us during dinner about the goal he scored during his soccer game on Saturday. We asked him how he got so fast, and he replied in his sweet southern accent, "I don't know, because I don't even exercise. I think Jesus helps me run fast!"

We were teaching the Plan of Salvation to their family, and it was especially tender, because their Mom passed away just over a year ago. It really touched me to see how much it meant to the kids--even though they're so young.

I love the verses in 3rd Nephi 11, when the resurrected Christ appears to the people, and invites them each to come unto Him.

"Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

"...Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

*"And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth **one by one** until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was He, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come". (3rd Nephi 11:10, 14-15)*

I know that Jesus Christ lives. He is our Savior. He is our friend. He suffered and died for our sins, and rose on the 3rd day. That knowledge has changed my life, it has changed the Cook's lives....I know the "light and life of the world". How grateful I am for Him.



4/6/15-“...the one who stole the Batman sign.”

Dear Family,

Elder Anderson and I were talking this last week about our emails home. He said "You know, the longer I've been out, the shorter my emails get. I mean, we do pretty much the same stuff every day. We tract. We talk to people. We teach people, or get yelled at." So please don't take the limited quantity of email content to mean that we just sit around all day. I usually just write about the really spiritual or comic experiences of the week.

For example, we were contacting potential investigators and ran into Connie. We talked about religion, politics, family and friends."Hey, let's watch my husband pull out this bush with a tractor...Let's go see my dogs out back....let's go for a ride in my golf cart around town...yeah, that's where my son lives, the one who stole the Batman sign."

Flashback two weeks. We're in the city of Dugger (mining community) and come across Batman street. Elder Anderson is a comic enthusiast and was super excited to get a picture with the sign. Problem was someone had stolen the sign! There just may be interrogation this week...

Conference was great. It was very different not being welcomed by President Monson or hearing him speak Sunday morning for longer than he did, but the talks were definitely inspired. It was very difficult to understand President Packer's talk, but when he bore testimony of the Atonement of Jesus Christ the Spirit bore witness to me that what he was saying was true very powerfully. My favorite was Elder Bednar's about finding peace and direction. Two scriptures I felt were themes of the conference:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Sorry, gotta go! I love you all!

Elder Larsen

4/6/15-Sister Dunn

Dear Family,

I hope you all had a wonderful Easter! Sister Dunn and I spent yesterday morning "Easter Caroling". We knocked on people's doors and sang, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today". It was wonderful to sing in harmony and invite the Spirit into our day--and hopefully into theirs.

Speaking of Sister Dunn, I am very grateful to be serving with her! She is from southern California, the oldest of 4 kids, and has been out for about a year. She is very obedient and consecrated, and I am learning a lot from her. She is also a great soprano, and so we've enjoyed singing together each morning. We have worked so hard together this week, which feels so good!

I hope you all enjoyed general conference. I was amazed as talk after talk focused on the family. It's desperately needed in today's world. I am always touched by our inspired leaders. I know they truly receive revelation from God.

Speaking of living prophets, this week we were discussing what it would've been like to be missionaries before the restoration. Can you imagine? Being a missionary in the 1700's, and teaching, "After the apostles were killed, the priesthood was taken off the earth. There was no longer authority to baptize or confer the Holy Ghost, and there were no prophets receiving direction from God. Because of that confusion, we have hundreds of different Churches today. None of them have that priesthood authority that Christ had."

Can you imagine??? Before the restoration, the story just ended there! How sad! Looking through that perspective has made me so, so grateful for the Restoration of the Gospel. Now we can teach, "In 1820, God once again reached out in love to call a Prophet, and to give him that same priesthood authority that Christ had. Christ's original Church is on earth today, let by prophets of God." I am so grateful for the clarity and peace that comes from the Restoration!

Last night, we saw a miracle with the Cook Family. We shared the story of Moses, and how the children of Israel had to "get their feet wet"--to take a step of faith--before the Red Sea parted. We talked about how sometimes we feel like there is a sea before us; whether that be preparing for Baptism, or coming back to Church, or perhaps simply staying strong through trials, but as we "get our feet wet", God is better able to help and enable us. We invited Brother Cook to take a step of faith by setting a baptism goal for the end of April. He was a little nervous, but agreed to pray about it. As we concluded the lesson, he told us, "Thank you for believing in our family".

I think all of us--no matter what stage of life we're at--need to take those steps of faith. The step is different for all of us, but it's only as we move forward that we invite Christ's power into our lives. As we do, we can trust in the words of Moses, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13). I know that promise has proved true in my life.

I hope you will all feel Christ's strength enter your life as you "get your feet wet" by taking your individual steps of faith.

I love you!

~Sister Larsen

4/13/15-God's Power at Work

Dear Family,

It's been a good week. We've had some good experiences connecting with people here and moving the work forward.

Last Sunday we were called on to give a blessing to a boy whose family was visiting a member's family. We came to the country road we were supposed to take to get to the town they live in, but found it to be under water, so we continued to head South. We drove for a good while, passing through unfamiliar territory and towns trying to figure out where we were at. Heading North we came across a "Sullivan County" sign...yeah, we had gone out of the mission. We had a good laugh about it.

We gave the kid a blessing in which I blessed him to be able to run and to play and enjoy the rest of their stay. Afterwards he got right up and started playing with the rest of the kids just like normal. The member's father then came into the room and asked for a blessing. He'd been having knee problems and was looking to get surgery as soon as possible. After the blessing he started feeling so good he told his wife he didn't feel like they even needed to go into the doctor. His wife convinced him otherwise and he did end up getting the debris removed and is doing well. As a missionary you give quite a few blessings. Sometimes I feel like we're just going through the motions and then I am reminded once again that no, this truly is God's power at work. It's awesome.

One family we've gotten to know quite well is Josh and Veronica. They are good friends to the members who took us down to Louisville and had us over for dinner the other night. Best vegetable soup ever. We had a really good time visiting with them and sharing the "Because He Lives" Easter video. This past week we saw them again at the Brewer's b-day party they had for their dog. (People honestly live for dogs out here). The next day they had us over to their house to pick up more vegetable soup and ended up inviting us in, feeding us apple pie, and taking us "smoking" in their big black truck. (In this area truck racing and black smoke emissions are all the rage.) The coon hunt was this weekend. You wouldn't believe how big it is. People win up to \$50,000 for winning. (Think "Where the Red Fern Grows") Crazy.

Another family we continue to fellowship is the Eble's (the old couple who run the neighborhood "orphanage" mentioned earlier). He continues to show us off to just about everyone he knows. We went to mass with him Saturday evening. It was a very interesting experience. Gregorian chanting is great. They had some really nifty pull-out padded knee rests under the benches we knelt down on for parts of the service. Lots of getting up and down. You have to have finesse to be a Catholic. Getting sprinkled was cool. (Apparently Catholics baptize by "pouring" water down the forehead, not by sprinkling. Sprinkling is where the Father dips a sort of circular metal mallet into blessed water and flicks it onto the congregation. No idea where the practice comes from.)

Yesterday we showed "Finding Faith in Christ" to the residents of a local care facility. They seemed to enjoy it. We're going to start holding a sacrament meeting for all of the members out this way who have a hard time getting to church half-an-hour away. We're working working really hard to get people to come so that we will be able to continue the meeting and could use your faith and prayers.

Anyway, we're going mushroom hunting today weather permitting. We're all about that country life.

“We do not have to cry unto him with many words. We do not have to weary him with long prayers. What we do need, and what we should do as Latter-day Saints, for our own good, is to go before him often, to witness unto him that we remember him and that we are willing to take upon us his name, keep his commandments, work righteousness; and that we desire his Spirit to help us...What do you pray for? You pray that God may recognize you, that he may hear your prayers, and that he may bless you with his Spirit.” President Joseph F. Smith

With Love,

Elder Larsen



4/13/15-“Perfect love casteth out all fear”

Dear Family,

I hope you are all doing well! I was so excited to hear about Jared's VEX Robotics competition--congrats Jared!!!

Spring is here in North Carolina. I feel like I just woke up one morning, and everything turned green. I love seeing the Dogwoods and Judas trees bloom, and look forward to the Crepe Myrtles as summer comes. It's so beautiful here!

We saw a miracle with Ted this week. For the first time, we felt like he really recognized the Spirit! On Monday night, we were asking him how he felt about general conference. He told us, "Well, when I went home from the Church last night, I just couldn't stop whistling, and I felt so happy! I know it's because I went to general conference". It was the first time he's actually acknowledged an answer. Yay, Ted!

This week I had the chance to go on exchanges with a Sister who has been out just a couple weeks. We were able to talk with a man on the street, and teach him a little about the Book of Mormon. I asked this Sister to teach him about a few of the pictures, which she did--very simply and clearly. Afterwards, she was *so excited*. It was the first time she had ever been brave enough to talk with someone on the street. Her excitement was contagious, and was such a good reminder to find joy in the little things--in life's everyday successes.

I had the opportunity to speak in Church yesterday, and my focus was the scripture in Moroni 8:16, which teaches us that, "Perfect love casteth out all fear". I talked about developing charity, and how that gives us the courage to share the Gospel. I love, though, that Moroni teaches how perfect love casteth out *all* fear. If we truly love the Savior, we don't have to fear anything: the opinions of others, choosing the right, the world's expectations, the trials of mortal life....our entire focus will be on Him.

I love the words of President Uchtdorf, "God does not need us to love Him. But, oh, how we need to love God!

For what we love determines what we seek. What we seek determines what we think and do. What we think and do determines who we are—and who we will become."

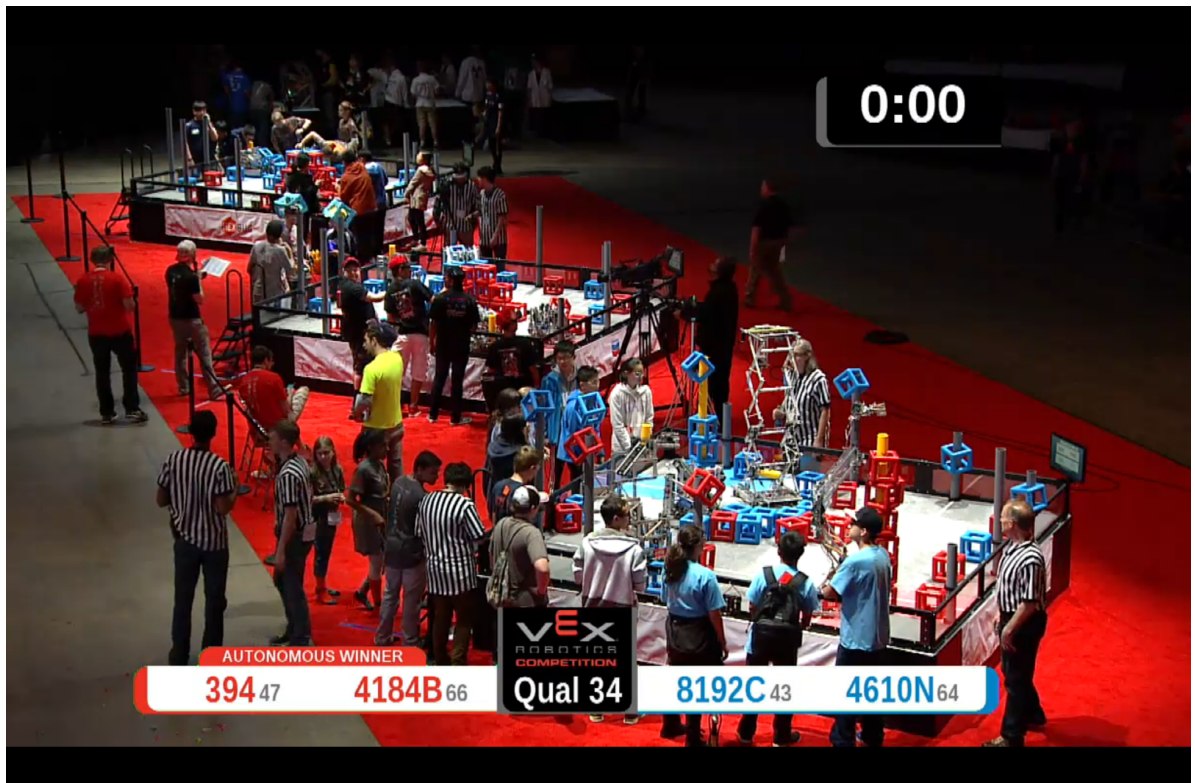
I know that loving our Savior and our fellowmen is truly the key to happiness! Perfect love really does cast out *all* fear.

I love you!

Sister Larsen



Jared would go on to take 2nd place at the Vex National Competition in Council Bluffs, Iowa—barely losing to first place. It was pretty amazing because the arena was sized a little differently so they lost quite a few matches and were a 21st seed that made a come-from-behind storm after finally getting the robot calibrated. They ended up going all the way and nearly beat first place. 😊





Jared placing another skyrise in his Vex competition



Area 4184B – 2nd Place







Temple Trip with Anne Marie, Nicole Ward (and her sister), Christine, Jessica, and Jared



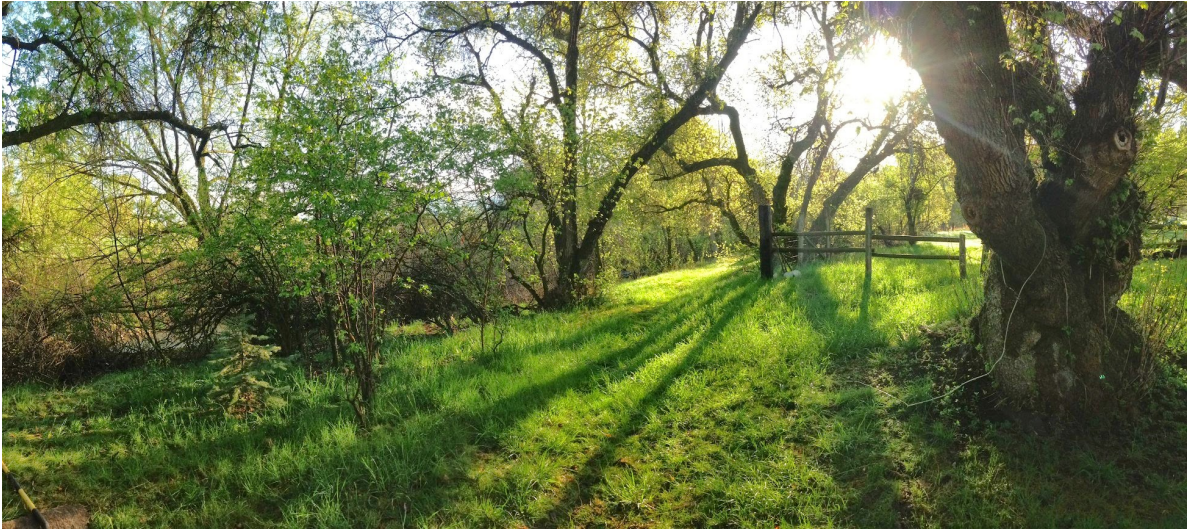
Jared - Very Attractive



Brigham City Temple Trip



Christine's Friends Temple Trip



Whitney Cemetery Trip

4/20/15-Three Stories, One Principle

Dear Family,

The highlight of this past week was our first sacrament meeting for the less-active members of this area who live so far away from the church and haven't been attending. There were 11 people, a couple from Sullivan who have been attending another ward (apparently she is allergic to church, like the actual building), a sister from the ward they've been attending, Sister Brewer and her daughter, a less-active member whose clan got offended by another family in the ward and hasn't been to church since and her granddaughter, our investigator Cindy, the Bishop, and us. Very simple, very spiritual. You should have felt the love and kinship that filled that room. Powerful.

I got to go on exchanges with Elder Williams from Davis County on Saturday. We met with a woman who was very hesitant to let us come over for the first time. Most of the visit was very awkward and the conversation forced. "To tell you the truth I really don't like being social. In fact I'm more of what you'd call a people-hater..." Nearing the end I felt like I should just tell her that even though we didn't really know her we loved her and were there to help her with whatever she needed. After giving her a blessing and dedicating her home we left her much more positive than she was to start out with.

We were preparing to do some tracting when he asked about a lady he knew from previous exchanges who we've not been able to contact since we've been here. Lo and behold she was out in front of her house smoking and invited us right in and told us everything we'd ever want to know about her situation in life and asked for our advice. After our visit we could tell that she had been touched.

That evening we visited the son-in-law of our Catholic neighbor, who was recently diagnosed with cancer and has been undergoing chemotherapy treatments. We shared some inspirational, uplifting scriptures with him and did all we could to help him understand that we loved him. Again I felt like he was greatly benefited by the visit.

Three stories, one principle: Love. Many times the best thing you can do to help someone is just to

love them. No hidden agenda, no ulterior motives, pure, Christlike love. It should be the motive behind all we do.

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all man know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

John 13:34-35

I love all of you, and I sincerely desire to love all. May the Lord bless us in our efforts to love Him and His children more perfectly.

Elder Larsen

Christine's Graduation Pictures





4/20/15-Sister Nunn

Dear Family,

I hope y'all are doing well!

Something I've loved about this week is how much we've felt guided by the Spirit. It's wonderful to follow a prompting, and to realize it was really Heavenly Father--not just my own thoughts. A couple of moments in particular:

-One morning this week, we prayed before going out the door, and I just felt like our plans weren't right. We needed to be somewhere else. Sister Dunn asked where, and I simply didn't know. As we made phone calls, however, we got in touch with Cassandra, a woman that missionaries met in the past that we have been trying to catch *forever*. She works all the time, but it just so happened that--when we called--she was home, and open to a visit. It was the anniversary of her Sister's passing, and had been a hard day for her. We were able to talk about the Temple, and the blessing of being sealed as eternal families. The Spirit was strong, and Cassandra was really comforted and excited about receiving those blessings for her family.

-Our district ate lunch at a great southern place called Zaxby's. We had the sweetest cashier named Victoria, who asked a few questions about what we do as missionaries. After we sat down with our food, I just kept thinking about Victoria. I wrote her a little note on a pass-along card, and gave it to her before we left. As I did, she asked, "Wait...so could I call y'all...anytime, and you could help me? I really want to get right with God". I had *no idea* she was struggling, but how sweet to have that prompting confirmed!

I'm just realizing over and over again that this is the Lord's work. I love the scripture in the Book of Mormon when the Lord says, "I am able to do mine own work" (2nd Nephi 27:21). The Lord will do His work regardless, we are just blessed to be a part of it.

This week we met Ted's Uncle Glenn, who was really sweet, but a little hard of hearing. As we talked with him, he asked Sister Dunn, "Are you sure you want to do this *all your life*?" She replied, "Well, I love being a missionary, but I'm not going to do it for all of my life." He said, "But Ted said that you're Sister Nunn!" Ted chimed in at this point, "No, Glenn! Her name is Sister *Dunn*, not Sister *Nunn*! She's not a nun, she's a Mormon!" So, so funny!

We've also had some interesting comments from members during lessons this week....One member shared a story about her non-member husband giving their daughter a priesthood blessing, and told our investigator that their husband could do the same....one member asked us during Ted's lesson if Sister missionaries could also baptize....we had a little clarifying to do--for members and investigators both!

The sweetest part of this week was Sunday, when we had stake conference and then interviews with President Craven. It had been raining hard all day, and so the power was out in the stake center where interviews were being held. President Craven interviewed us by the stairs so the light could shine in. It worked until about 8 o'clock :-)

Stake Conference was *so, so* sweet. Every talk was centered on the Savior--the premortal Christ, Christ as a child, the Atonement....by inspiration, our stake president changed the closing song to "I Believe in Christ". As the song played, I felt such profound gratitude for the Savior and His Atonement--I got choked up and couldn't even sing. I am eternally grateful for all He has done for me, and the power He gives each of us to change.

I know He lives! I know He loves us. I am so humbled and grateful to represent Him. It sure makes me want to be better.

I love you all so much!

Sister Larsen



Logan Temple Trip

4/27/15-Enter Elder Lovstedt

Dear Family,

Thursday President Cleveland called to let us know that Elder Anderson would be swapping places with a trainee to babysit his trainer for three weeks until he gets sent home to get treatment for his back problems he's been struggling with for a long time. I'm now completing the training of Elder Lovstedt from Pocatello, Idaho.



He was born in California but lived in Idaho for the five years before coming out. (Oh, and he's a 1/4 Russian) He's very quiet. That'll change.

Sunday afternoon we had the privilege to visit the site of the first chapel built in Southern Indiana back in the early days of the church, commonly referred to as the "Mormon Temple".

Standing on those grounds I thought "Wow, and now the state's getting its first 'real' temple!".

I've been studying a lot about faith and prayer lately. One scripture that has come to fulfillment in the past few days is Matthew 7:7-8

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." We found three really cool people who immediately accepted our invitation to learn about the Gospel in about two hours of tracting. We're told that God is preparing His children to receive the Gospel and that there are people in every area who are ready. It's true. All we have to do is ask, seek, and knock.

Here's a quote by Elder Bruce R. McConkie that I found in my studies this morning:

"There is *nothing* in the gospel that is better designed to keep the attention of men centered on God, on righteousness, and on their duties than is prayer. *Every* thought, word, and act is influenced or governed by the nature and extent of one's communion through prayer with Deity."

Don't underestimate the power of faith and prayer. They are the means by which we gain the desires of our hearts so long as they are in accordance with the will of God.

Sending My Love,

Elder Larsen

4/27/15-From Catholic to Baptist

Dear Family,

Last week, Sister Dunn was "Sister Nunn". This week, Sister Dunn reminded me of a Baptist. We got a referral from a member, and we were so excited, so we stopped to say a prayer of gratitude. During my prayer, she kept muttering things under her breath like "Yes, we're so grateful" just like the Baptists do. She said she didn't even realize it--she was just so excited!

We did get several member referrals this week, which was really exciting. Yesterday we had the opportunity to teach a man named Chester, who has started dating a member of our ward. He's already been to Church 3 times, and is halfway through 1 Nephi, and he understands it really well. He's really sincere--I think the member introduced him initially, but now he is exploring it for himself. As we taught the Restoration last night, the Spirit was really strong.

We also met a great young man this week named Randy. He is 21 years old, but hasn't been to Church for several years; ever since his Baptist Church broke up and there were some hurt feelings. He really misses attending, though, and realizes--unlike many in the South--that going to Church is an important part of a relationship with God. After our second lesson, Randy agreed to pray. Afterwards, he was fairly quiet, and admitted that it was the first time he had prayed in several years. He is excited to get back on track--I really feel like it was a miracle we met him.

A funny moment from this week: We got home one night around 9, and

This week I received some exciting news! Andy--who I taught in Eden--was baptized this weekend. He had many challenges to overcome, but now--a year later--he finally made it! I also received word that the Contreras Family was baptized in Charlotte this weekend. I'm so, so happy! It's sweet to see that--even when it takes some time--the Lord will eventually give everyone a chance to learn about (and hopefully accept!) His Gospel. The fruits aren't any less sweet, even when they come a little later than planned.

I think that's an important lesson to learn. So often we feel that our desires are righteous, and so we feel justified in wanting them *right now*. It was a righteous desire to want Andy to get baptized, and it was a righteous desire to want the Contreras Family to get baptized. But *it wasn't time*. It can be hard to trust in the Lord's timing, but I know He knows best. I love the counsel given in Words of Mormon 1:7, "And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things *which are to come*; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will." Our job isn't to worry about the *when*, but to always strive to follow the Spirit and do the Lord's will. If we do that, we can be at peace, knowing that everything will eventually work out.

I'm grateful to be learning these lessons about trusting the Lord, and to see the Lord's hand--in my life and other's--each day. Look for Him--I know He's there.

All my Love,

Sister Larsen

5/4/15-A Symbol and Representative of Jesus Christ

"Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words." Saint Francis of Assisi

One of the best and worst parts of being a missionary is that you are a symbol. You represent the Lord Jesus Christ and are given the authority to preach His Gospel for 18 months to two years. You are blessed to be the means by which hundreds if not thousands of lives are blessed. On the other hand, because you represent Jesus Christ, you become a "stone of stumbling" and "rock of offense" Isaiah spoke of, just like Christ was and is. As a result many people automatically hate you.

We felt inspired to do some tracting before service last Wednesday. We walked, not really knowing where we were supposed to go. After knocking a couple of doors we knocked on the door of a trailer and a very sickly-looking woman poked her head out behind the door and asked "Mormon?" "Yes." She then slowly stepped out and sat down on the steps with her head down, totally dejected. We stood there silent for quite some time, all the while communicating a message of love and peace through Jesus Christ. After a time the silence was broken and we came to find out she and her husband were converts whose trailer had burned down several months previous. Yes we could come back. Yes they'd like to come back to church. Yes, God led us there.

That Friday we stood in the living room of a woman who had totally snapped. She romped around the room muttering to herself unintelligibly and from time to time yelling at us. In my mind I was running through our options of escape if she tried to attack us. "Hand Elder Lovstedt the keys to the car and keep her distracted until he got it started so I could book it out of there...tackling her to the ground if she tries to stab me with those scissors she's holding and then calling the police..." We ended up slowly inching our way out the door as she continued to hurl insults at us and then turning our backs and walking away.

"And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat..." (1 Corinthians 4:12-13)

When we were baptized we promised to stand as witnesses of Christ at all times and in all things, and in all places. (Mosiah 18:9) As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we will be persecuted. Thank goodness not like the saints in the primitive church or in the 1800's. Today it is in the form of being looked down on for upholding standards of morality and virtue. Be happy when people make fun of you; it means you're living up to the covenants you've made. You are preaching the Gospel through the way you live.

I am "the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints" (D&C 89:3) "...my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless I know in whom I have trusted. O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever...therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God." (2 Nephi 4:19, 34-35)

Elder Larsen

5/4/15-Elizabeth and Jess

Dear Family,

I hope you are doing well! I feel like the time since Christmas has flown, and can't believe that we get to Skype again this Sunday! I can't wait to see all of you!

I feel like we've really seen the Lord's hand in our lives this week, and in the lives of those we're teaching.

We were able to get back in touch with a sweet lady named Elizabeth, who we met several weeks ago. We thought she had been ignoring our calls and texts, and it was hard to believe her explanation that her phone was "in the bottom of her son's bag". When we came for our return appointment, however, we were humbled to realize how much the Gospel is starting to mean to her. She told us she had been reading in the Book of Mormon, and when she went to get her copy, we saw that she had bought a case to put it in, as well as a study journal to record the things she's learning. She's been carrying it around with her, and reads whenever she gets a spare minute at work. When we first met her, she knew next to nothing about religion, and had stopped praying because she felt angry at God. Now, she has started praying with her kids every night, and is thinking constantly about Baptism. It's amazing to see how much Heavenly Father can help us change.

The other miracle we saw this week was Jess. Jess is the friend and roommate of a recent convert in our ward--Sister Parker. We've met her several times in the past, but she has *never* been open. Last Sunday, however, Sister Parker texted us and said that Jess had questions, and would really like us to teach her. As we talked, Jess opened up about her challenges, and how she really feels like God could provide a foundation for her family that she never had growing up. She's had a really hard life, and as we explained that Christ has felt everything she's ever felt, she thought about it for a long time, and then said, "I've never heard that before". We could tell it deeply touched her. She was able to come to Church on Sunday, and said it just felt right. Once again, I was so humbled by the fact that I had always assumed she "wasn't ready", when the Lord has been working in her life all along.

One of my favorite quotes from President Uchtdorf says, "Those who diligently seek to learn of Christ eventually will come to know Him. They will personally receive a divine portrait of the Master, although it most often comes in the form of a puzzle—one piece at a time. Each individual piece may not be easily recognizable by itself; it may not be clear how it relates to the whole. Each piece helps us to see the big picture a little more clearly. Eventually, after enough pieces have been put together, we recognize the grand beauty of it all. Then, looking back on our experience, we see that the Savior had indeed come to be with us—not all at once but quietly, gently, almost unnoticed."

It's amazing to see how Christ has been trying to help Elizabeth and Jess all along. As they have come seeking, He is there waiting. He always has been. I know it's the same for each of us. I've found that as I have questions, or doubts, the answers don't come all at once. My testimony doesn't come all at once. But I know that it *comes*. As I'm seeking to learn of Christ, I am coming to know Him--one piece at a time. And nothing could be sweeter than that.

I love you each so much! Thank you for your examples of Christlike love.

Sincerely,

Sister Larsen

5/11/15-Using Family History in the Work

Remember that family we tracted into two weeks ago? The converts whose trailer had burned down several months ago. So I guess they haven't been to church in at least ten years. This past Sunday she came to church. It was so cool to see her walking into the chapel, slowly taking everything in as she nervously glanced around for a seat. After administering the sacrament I sat down next to her. She'd ask questions like "Joseph Smith? Wait...who took the Saints over to Utah? Who's Hinckley?" While sitting with her in Gospel Principles she leaned over to me and, pointing to the manual, said "I'm going to read this whole thing." She reminded me several times that she still wants a large-print triple combination to read instead of the regular size Book of Mormon we had given her. What a blessing to see her turning her life around.

We were out tracting in the area the other day. A boy probably around eight years old wearing glasses and cowboy boots was out riding a tiny little bike giving us quizzical looks. We went up to one house and he rode up to us and said "Oh, that's my house!" He hurried past us, opened the door, and brought his mom out. After visiting with her I asked "Is there anyone you know who would be interested in our message..." "I would!" the little boy quickly voiced. As we proceeded down the road he followed us on his bike and told us about everyone in his neighborhood. "Oh, they're not home right now...she's really old...they have a lot of dogs..." We started thinking he was going to follow us all the way home. "...becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, willing to submit to all things ..., even as a child doth submit to his father. " (Mosiah 3:19)

One thing President Cleveland has been focusing on lately is using family history work in proselyting. Preach My Gospel teaches:

"Family history or genealogy provides another way you can find people to teach. Family history is now one of the most widespread hobbies in the world. The Spirit of Elijah is influencing millions of people throughout the world to search for their ancestors. Many desire a stronger connection with their extended family. This can lead to a desire to find a connection and identity with God's family."

We've really found this to be true in our finding efforts. We have one lady we invited a while back to learn about her family and have been doing family history with her every Wednesday since then. We had to individuals this past week who accepted the same invitation. As members of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-Day Saints, we have a special responsibility to seek out the living and the dead who are ready to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Receiving the ordinances of salvation and exaltation is the end goal for both groups. It is our duty to find them.

With Love,
Elder Larsen



Celebrating our Anniversary at Anniversary Inn

5/11/15-Mother's Day and Miracles!

Dear Family,

It was so, so wonderful to see all of you yesterday! I love you all so much! I think we shared most of our news as we talked yesterday, but there were a couple other sweet miracles from this week that I wanted to share.

On Saturday night we went to visit a less-active sister, Sister Mullis, who hasn't been to Church in years and years. She's still friendly toward the missionaries, however, and seems to enjoy talking with us when we come. She's been going through a really hard time with some circumstances in her family, and so we asked if we could read the Book of Mormon with her. As we read, we realized she didn't really understand what it was saying. It was so sweet to "walk with her" and explain what different words and phrases meant. By the end, she seemed to feel empowered rather than frustrated, and it felt so good to know she would hopefully read more from the scriptures in the future.

Not only that, but toward the end of the lesson, she admitted how much she misses having friends to do things with. She told us, "I just want to be part of a Church that does things together rather than just study all the time". Miracle of miracles--that night the ward was having a spaghetti dinner to help raise money for the YM and YW to go to camp this summer. Sister Mullis works *all the time*, but the dinner was at the perfect time and place, and she agreed to come! She seemed *so excited*, and just kept saying, "Thank you girls. Really, thank you." When she came to the dinner, she actually knew a few of the members, and seemed to have a really positive experience. That's the first time she's been in the church building in *years*. So happy!

Another sweet miracle: We taught Jess again on Monday night, and she is doing really well. She agreed to be baptized on May 30th. When I asked how she hoped her life would change after baptism, she replied, "It's already changing--in lots of little ways". I'm so grateful she's seeing the difference the Gospel makes in one's life!

She also shared how she knows this is the right path for her. After we left the first time, she went outside on her deck and saw the most beautiful sunset. She felt like it was a sign from God that this was right. She called to her roommate Heather (the recent convert) to come and look at the sunset. Heather told Jess that when she first met with the missionaries, the *same thing* happened to her. She went outside and saw a beautiful sunset, and felt that the Gospel was true. I was deeply touched that Heavenly Father spoke to these 2 friends in the same way, helping Jess to even better recognize her answer. He knows us so well--it amazes me!

I'm so grateful to have the Gospel in my life--to know that Heavenly Father loves us and is aware of us. He truly is our Father.

I love all of you dearly! Keep the faith.

Sister Larsen



Mother's Day Song

(verse 1)

When I was young, you taught me how to CPR
Now that I'm gone, I hold your teachings in my heart
Your so wonderful, and I remember every day.

When I left home, I still remember how you hugged me,
But still I know, you let me go because you love me.
And I miss you Mom, I wanna' tell you that today.
But don't worry 'bout me, cuz I promise I'm okay.

(chorus 1)

When I go out each day, I have a smile on my face.
And I can do it, because I'm loved by Mom.
And when I teach, I think of how you would teach me.
And I feel the Spirit, like I felt with Mom.

(Sister Dunn's verse)

I still can hear you sweetly singing in the morning
When you are near, my life is never sad or boring.
They call me Sister Dunn, but when they do I think of you.

(Sister Larsen's verse)

I still recall in the early mornings before choir,
you helped, you helped, get me out the door when it was dire.
You always made me toast, and helped me find my shoes.
Always there for me, I want to be there for you too.

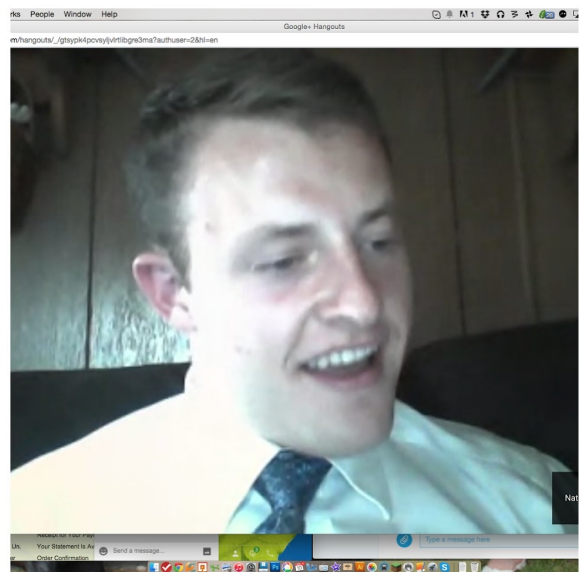
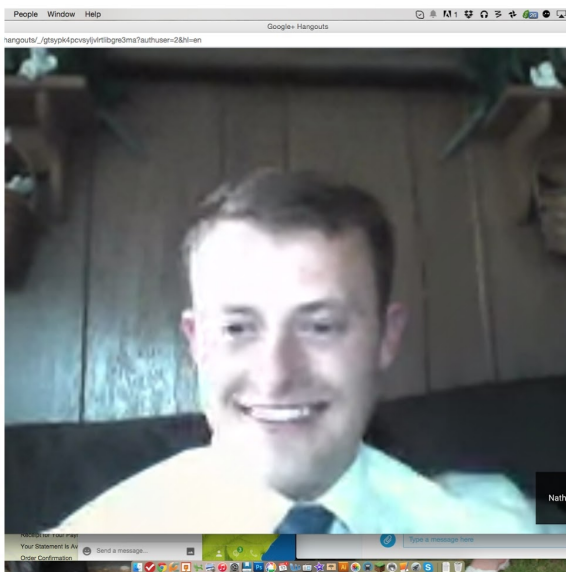
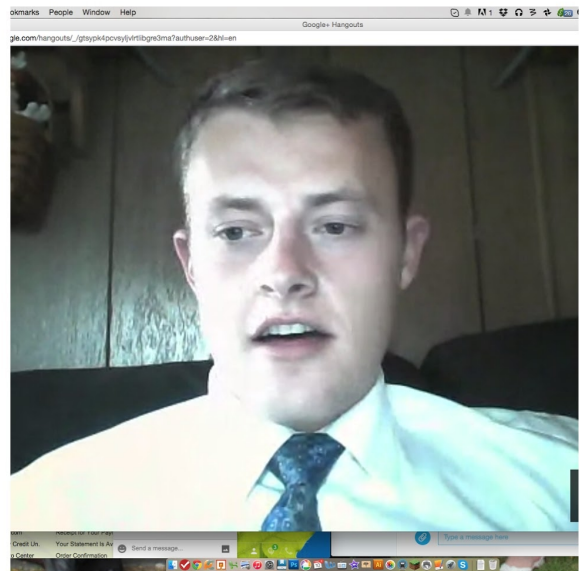
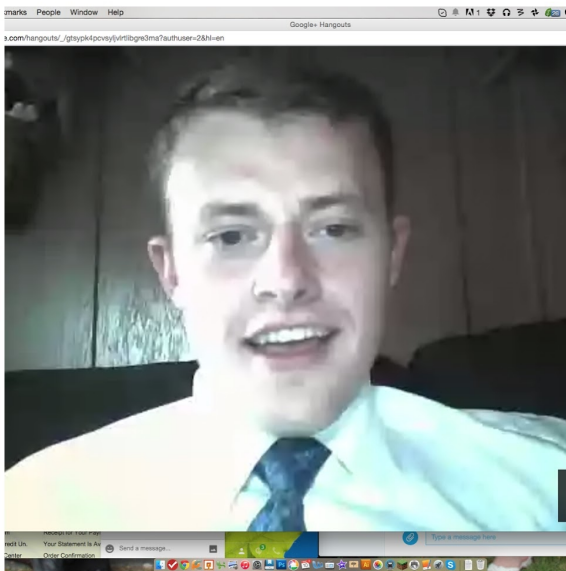
(chorus 2)

When I go out to walk, I am not ever scared to talk.

And I have courage, because I'm loved by Mom.
And when I find, I can see them dressed in white.
And I can love them, because I learned from Mom.

I learned from Mom, I learned from Mom.
And I can do it, because I learned from Mom.

Love you, Mom!



Talking to Nathan on Mother's Day

5/18/15-Tender Mercies and Pure Testimony

It's been a busy week! Lots of finding and teaching and tender mercies!

Sister Scheeringa came to church again this week. Working with her is much like working with a new investigator. When you've been inactive for a while you lose so much of what you knew. Our testimonies are much like a fire: feed it and they will grow, neglect it and the flames will slowly die down and eventually extinguish. But, those coals can be used to easily rekindle the flame.

We found some cool people this week. Kendall is a young guy living with his parents. He spends most of his time working and is a member of a local masonic chapter. We taught him the Restoration and he seemed to receive it well. One thing we do in this mission (I think it's the same across the country and probably throughout the world) is to give people a warning about the opposition they will face in praying, reading, meeting with us again, etc. He seemed to be able to relate to that being a Mason. There's a lot of anti-Mormon feelings in this county, as has been very evident this week. Satan's working just as hard as we are. The only difference is he is recruiting for a team that has already lost the game.

Another guy we met is named Jerry. I guess his faith comes from a movie he saw (I'm guessing the Da Vinci Code). He thinks there is a descendant of Christ being hid somewhere in the world who leads an underground church movement. So....he's a little off in his thinking, but hey, I think he's got some potential.

Another person we met is an Apostolic Pentecostal named Jamie, who lives in a trailer in the middle of nowhere. Through tears and occasional laughs she explained that her daughter and granddaughter are living with her. I guess her young daughter has some serious addiction problems that have just torn the family apart. She expressed concerns about praying and fighting temptation and finding that "something" in life God had for her. We were able to testify of the reality of God and His plan for us and really help her to feel the Spirit.

One door we knocked on a guy wearing a Jesus shirt stepped out with a skeptical look on his face. He quickly proceeded to denounce Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and our faith in general. After he paused to take a breath I bore my testimony of prophets, seers, and revelators in our day. He really didn't have anything to say to that. It was great! "...and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them." (Alma 4:19)

That's what we as missionaries do. We invite, we bear testimony, and we promise. That's all we can do. We teach them how to build a fire, and give them the match and wood, and then it's up to them to strike the match and light the wood. So build your fires, and help others to do the same.

Love to All,

Elder Larsen

5/18/15-Trusting in the Power of the Atonement

Dear Family,

I feel like time is just flying! And miracles are still happening! I don't think a week goes by that I don't feel like we've seen miracles. Heavenly Father is so good to us.

This week we taught Jess the word of wisdom. We knew she smoked, and so we really wanted to teach her in a spiritual environment where she could feel that it was right. When we arrived, however, it was anything *but* a spiritual environment. Between Jess and Sister Parker, they have 6 kids under the age of 6, and ALL of them were home. Talk about crazy. As we tried to start teaching, we looked at each other--unsure if we should even share anything. We decided to teach anyway, and I was amazed at how the Spirit *still* touched Jess, despite the hectic situation. The moment she heard about the word of wisdom, she said, "That makes sense. Our bodies are so important to God's plan, so it makes sense that He would want us to take care of them." She readily agreed to give up coffee and smoking, and we're hoping to teach her the "stop smoking" program this week. The Lord is so aware of her!

I wanted to share a sweet lesson I learned this week. It's always interesting what moments Heavenly Father uses to teach us. I always expect it to come during studies in the morning, but I find that revelation often comes as we just go about each day. One of those moments happened yesterday, while we were standing on an investigator's doorstep. While we waited for them to come to the door, I looked around at the yard strewn with toys and garbage and such. It's easy to sometimes dismiss people in such circumstances, but then I thought to myself, "I need to have more faith in these people". In that moment, though, the Spirit taught me that we don't need to have faith in the people. We have to love them, absolutely, but our faith needs to lie solely in the Atonement of Christ. If we struggle to believe that people can change, we need to trust Christ more, because His sacrifice is enough to help anyone change--regardless of their circumstances. It was a sweet and humbling lesson. So.....when I doubt that people aren't ready, I'm trying to just trust more in the power of the Atonement.

I think that same principle applies in our lives. The world teaches messages such as "Believe in Yourself!" or "You are perfect--just the way you are". And those things aren't bad. It's important to be confident and happy with who you are. But I think it's so important to remember that when we are discouraged, or when we truly want to change, we don't need to have more faith in ourselves. We need to have more faith in our Savior, because it is in and through Him that we can experience *lasting* confidence; *lasting* change.

I am so grateful for this opportunity to serve the Lord. Thank you for the strength you are to me! I'm more grateful for you than you can ever know.

All my love,

Sister Larsen

5/26/15-Led by the Spirit

Ok...so I don't have too much time today, but I'll fit in what I can.

Congratulations to all those graduating this year! Lots of hard work finally paying off for those preparing to go on missions or to school.

We're doing well. Staying very busy pounding the streets. I'm getting a nice tan line right around my collar. By the end of the summer I'll always be wearing a white shirt regardless if I have one on or not!

We've had some interesting experiences this week when it comes to being led by the Spirit. One day we had planned to go to a certain part of town to do some finding. As we got closer I started feeling very heavy and my mind felt clouded. The further we walked the worse it got until I could hardly take another step. We stopped on the street corner: "Ok...we're obviously doing something wrong here" and then turned around and walked in the opposite direction. No idea why.

We had left the phone at the apartment going to district meeting Friday morning. Minutes after getting back we received an urgent text that a sister who we're good friends with had just had a heart attack and needed a blessing. We were able to quickly contact missionaries up where she was in the hospital for her to receive a blessing. It seems like oftentimes the Lord makes up for our shortcomings and still influences circumstances so that things work out according to His will.

Thinking about our investigator Cindy I felt very strongly that we should show her a video about the apostasy and Restoration of the Gospel. She's struggled with understanding why she needs to be baptized again in spite of all our explanations. After the video she was quite for a minute, and then turned to us and said, that answered my question.

This is the Lord's work. He is in charge. Through prayer we can align our will with His and be able to accomplish His purposes.

With Love,

Elder Larsen



One Final Drive Before Retiring the Robot



Christine Running Cross Country

5/26/15-"Has the day of miracles ceased?"

Dear Family,

President and Sister Craven always call our mission "The North Carolina Charlotte Mission of Miracles". I feel like I have really seen that come true this week!

Last Tuesday, we were at the Doctor's office for Sister Dunn to get a check-up (luckily she's fine) and I was a little sad that we would have less time proselyting. As I waited for her, I started reading in the Book of Mormon, in Moroni Chapter 7. I've always loved Moroni's teachings about how miracles come according to our faith. Just as I read those verses, the phone started to ring. Although the office was very quiet, I felt prompted to answer. On the other line was a lady named Marie, who wondered if we could meet at the Church for a lesson. We had never met her before, but she has been dating a member from Arkansas, and has read the Book of Mormon. She's been going through some incredibly hard challenges with health and family, but she knows the Gospel will bring her peace. She said she has found "beautiful truths" in the Book of Mormon about the Savior, and already feels that it is true. Incredible!

Tuesday evening, we were able to teach Chester again. We planned on teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and were nervous but excited to set a Baptism date. It's only been recently that he's started opening up, and so we weren't sure how he would respond. The Spirit was strong throughout the lesson, and when we invited Chester to be baptized, he didn't hesitate for a moment before saying yes. When we asked why, he related that the day before, out of the blue, he felt something come over him, and he got on mormon.org to see what it would take to be a member of the Church. As he read about baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost, he said it just felt right; it felt like the path God wanted him to take. That was an answer directly from Heavenly Father--both to our prayers and to Chester's.

The other miracle I wanted to share happened just last night. We had a great Memorial Day, and met many wonderful people. In the evening, we felt prompted to visit a less-active sister who we knew nothing about--Debra Travis. We've never visited her in the past, because she lives almost half-an-hour away, in a rural town called Catawba. It felt like we drove forever before reaching her long dirt driveway.

We felt a little hesitant as we passed several "No Trespassing" signs, but as we arrived, we met a nice man named Tony, and his daughter, Alexis. They introduced us to Debra, who was really sweet as well. We started asking the usual questions, about when she joined the Church and about the last time she had attended. After a minute, however, we realized that she had *no idea* what we were talking about. She didn't remember ever being baptized, or ever even visiting the Church. We pulled up the record to look up her name. It said *Debra Nicole Travis*. We asked if that was her name, and she said her name was *Debra Sue Travis*. We noticed that the age wasn't right either. It took just a few seconds to realize that this woman was a *completely different Debra Travis!* Rather than thinking it strange, Debra seemed to realize that this was God's way of reaching out to her. She started to cry as she expressed her grief from losing many loved ones in recent years, and about how that's made her distance herself from Church and even from God. We had such a sweet conversation about the Plan of Salvation and about how we will have our loved ones again.

I have no idea how we got Debra's name and address, but I do know without a doubt that Heavenly

Father is aware of her. He knows her grief, and wants to bring her direction and peace. I know Heavenly Father wishes the same for every single one of us.

"Has the day of Miracles ceased?" I know it has not, and will not, because Heavenly Father will never stop loving us. He will *always* keep reaching out to us, if we have faith.

I love you all so much. I love this Gospel. I'm so grateful for a loving Heavenly Father who knows each of us personally.

~Sister Larsen



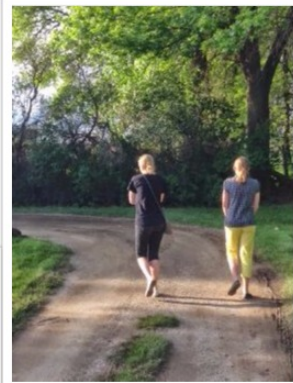
Temple Trip with Stephani and Grandma Larsen



Christine Helping with Wellsville Mile

Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat – Anne Marie and Jared







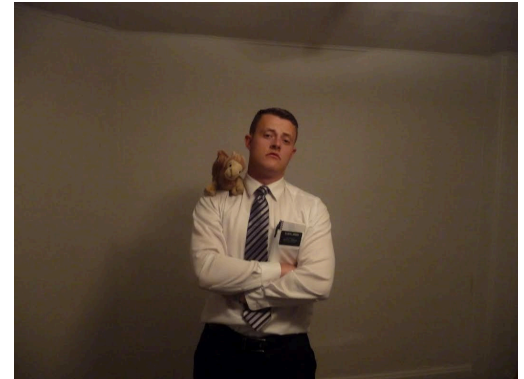
6/8/15-Happy Hump Day

Happy Hump Day! You guys....:)

We had a good week. Cindy is doing well. We had a great



lesson with her sharing the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith about the Book of Mormon. First thing after we sat down she started asking questions rapid fire about what she was learning from the Book of Mormon. We were



looking at each other thinking "Wow, this is great!" I think she's hit the point where she's really become independent in investigating the Gospel, doing it because she wants to learn and to do and to share. She went on to mormon.org and requested a Book of Mormon to give to a friend. "I just want to share all of this with the people around me." Now that is a burning testimony.

We were referred to a lady named Susie by the other missionaries who they met in their area. We sat down with her for the first time last night and taught the Restoration. As we began she informed us that she had already read the pamphlet several times. Asking her how she felt about what we had shared after the lesson, she replied that she felt "energized". She readily accepted the invitation to read the Book of Mormon and to continue to meet with us.

We saw a tender mercy at church this past Sunday. Months ago Elder Anderson and I stopped by a former investigator's house and met her member husband, who was less-than-excited to see us. He told us that he had read the Book of Mormon after being baptized and did not feel that it was true and decided to stop going to church. He politely told us not to come back. Lo and behold, we walk into the chapel yesterday and there he is in the back pew dressed nicely with a smile on his face. I asked him what motivated him to come back and he replied "I realized that I wasn't who I used to be back when I was going to church and that I needed to get back into it." Awesome.

This work is good. *Real* good. Sometimes we feel like we've been left up the creek without a paddle and are struggling desperately not to get washed downstream when God in His infinite goodness throws us a tow rope and pulls us to shore. Most of the successes I've seen on my mission and in life in general have not come as a direct result of what I'm doing. We spend hours pounding the streets and doors while God shakes His head and says "Oh Elder Larsen, you need some help..." and then literally drops a blessing out of no where right into our laps. I am eternally indebted to Him.

Elder Larsen

6/8/15-Birthday and Chester

Dear Family,

Thank you all for making my birthday so special through your gifts, cards, emails, etc. I love y'all so much!

It felt like a pretty normal day, but every day is a blessing as a missionary! Sister Dunn was sweet to take me to Sonic to dinner, and we had fun driving up to Wilkesboro for exchange. Sister Bolick--who drove us--taught me some new southern phrases. We stopped at the gas station, and she asked if I wanted a "nab". She pointed to the peanuts and crackers--nab is another word for snack. The other phrase was "half a dozen or 6 of the other" which essentially means "either way". Gotta' love the South!

A highlight of this week has definitely been teaching Chester. He is such a good man! We were planning on his baptism being June 13th, but he's taking a trip to Maryland, so he'll be getting baptized on June 20th instead. We are so excited for him! He is a great example--you would think that someone doing their residency would want to have a lot of facts, but he is so willing to take things by faith. He said several things this week that really touched me.

-When we asked him how the word of wisdom was going, he said, "It's been going well. Normally at work, I just eat the unhealthy food, but the other day, I remembered the word of wisdom, and I got fruit instead."

-We had a lesson about the Sacrament, and left him a couple chapters in the Book of Mormon to read about it. His takeaways were really sweet. He said, "As I read, I realized that the Sacrament isn't just important after baptism to renew that promise, but it's also important before baptism to prepare for that promise". He even changed his travel plans so he could attend Church before leaving.

-After he broke up with his member girlfriend, several of his coworkers told him, "Well, at least you don't have to take those lessons anymore". Chester replied boldly, "No--I'm passionate about the things they're teaching me". I'm so happy that he wants to know for himself!

This week for zone meeting, Sister Dunn and I were blessed to train on becoming extraordinary missionaries. As we studied, we felt like the equivalent of being an extraordinary missionary is simply being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We had each missionary read the talk by Elder Bednar "The Character of Christ" in preparation. At zone meeting, we gathered in a circle, and talked about who Christ truly is, and how is character blessed those around Him, and what it means to us to be representatives of the Savior. The Spirit was really strong--it was so sweet to hear everyone's testimonies.

In Elder Bednar's talk, he gives many examples of the Savior turning outward, and then he states, "I believe it is the consistency of the Lord's character across multiple episodes that is ultimately the most instructive and inspiring....throughout His mortal ministry, and especially during the events leading up to and including the atoning sacrifice, the Savior of the world turned outward--when the natural man or woman in any of us would have been self-centered and focused inward".

That is what amazes me. Not only was Christ loving, but He loved *perfectly*. Not only was He patient, but He never got upset--*not even once*. There are countless examples of Christ turning outward

because *He never thought about Himself*. I am so grateful for His example. It can seem overwhelming to try to emulate, but I know that it's through Christ's atonement that we can be a little more selfless each day--a little bit more like Him.

I love you all so much!

~Sister Larsen

P.S. Some good advice from a Church sign this week: "Be an organ donor. Give your heart to Jesus".



Construction begins South of the church adjacent to our home. You can see them digging Patriarch Slater's home. Isn't it beautifully green?

6/15/15-Investigators at Church

Remember that Elder Palmer guy? So now he's my Zone Leader. We've been on exchanges yesterday and today. Ironical since it was one year ago when we first got put together. So fun to reminisce about the "good ol' days" when I was just a kid. Wow.

We've had a good week...lots of driving. We went to Bloomington on Friday for Zone Meeting. Taking principles from the Book of Mormon and applying them into our own lives. Developing faith and courage as a missionary. Obedience to the missionary schedule.

We had three people to church Sunday. Yee haw! Here's the line-up: Cindy (the lady with fifteen pets living in her house; this was her second time coming to church), Anthony (a young disabled vet whose ex tried to burn down his trailer after they were divorced who has been studying with the Jehovah's Witnesses), and Bill (a former investigator from forever ago who we miraculously stumbled upon through a series of phone calls). It was awesome. Good fellowship. Lessons that answered their questions and fit right into what we're teaching them this week. Money.

We set up a little booth at a town's "Old Fashioned Days" festival centered around family history. We talked to quite a few people, some who seemed to really be interested. Slowly but surely.

Helaman 12 is a great chapter when it comes to understanding our nature as human beings. "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;" (Mosiah 14:6) The pride cycle is all too real. It is so difficult to stay on top. However, no matter where we're at, one thing's for sure:

"...we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him." (Helaman 12:1)

God stands ready to forgive all who will come unto Him. We have and will continue to make mistakes. Christ's sacrifice did and will serve as a ransom for sin. The Gospel is true. It truly does work if we will follow the pattern of exercising faith in Jesus Christ and doing all we can to follow Him.

Elder Larsen



Beautiful Anne Marie

6/15/15-Tears from Heaven

Dear Family,

I've been feeling a lot of different emotions, knowing this is the last full week of my mission. I feel determined, though, to give it my all. I'm excited for the miracles we'll see this week, especially with Chester's Baptism coming up on Saturday.

He is so excited, we are so excited, his friends are so excited, and the members are as well! On Sunday, we couldn't even find Chester after Sacrament meeting, because he was out in the foyer talking with all the members. To those he didn't know, he would introduce himself by saying, "I'm Chester. I'm really excited to get baptized on Saturday." He is so ready.

He was up visiting family in Maryland this week, and even went to the Washington, D.C. Temple with his nonmember family. They spent hours there, and he was so excited to tell us about the missionaries he met at the visitor's center, the focus on family, and the Spirit he felt. He told us, "If it feels that good on the grounds, I can't even wait to go inside!" He told us, "I just can't wait to receive the Holy Ghost. I just can't wait." I think I love teaching Chester because he really understands that the Gospel isn't just a checklist--it's a way of life. And because he understands that, he's allowing it to truly change him.

It's been getting more and more humid here in Newton-Conover, and we seem to get at least one summer shower each day. On Monday night, the summer shower turned into more of a thunderstorm as we were out finding with a member. We ran to seek shelter under a carport, as one of the neighbor's yelled to us, "It's the tears from Heaven!" (Not sure what that was supposed to mean....) We realized that a carport probably wasn't the safest place to seek refuge from lightning, so we ran to our cars and called it a night. Whew.

Our stake president--President Berry--is quite involved with the community, and this week he invited us to attend an interfaith dinner at The Church of God: Church of the Master. We felt quite young and inexperienced as we rubbed shoulders with about 10 religious leaders from around the community. There was a Jewish rabbi and several members from the local temple, several leaders from the Church of God, and a lady pastor from a nondenominational Church in the area. They were all very kind to us, though, and expressed interest in our missionary endeavors.

The whole purpose of the event was to unite in supporting core values in the community. Everyone was so kind, but it was interesting to realize the misconceptions people still have regarding the Church. As they started the meeting, they said, "We're grateful to gather together this evening as believers. As Christians, as Jews, and with our friends, the Latter-Day Saints...." We still have work to do in helping everyone know that we truly are Christian!

We each had a chance to express our thoughts about interfaith relations, and one woman commented, "I just think it's wonderful that we're coming together. I don't think God ever intended us to break apart into so many different factions."

We just looked at President Berry, and could tell we were each thinking the same thing--she was right! God didn't ever intend for His Gospel to be taught in so many different ways. How grateful I am to

know about the Restoration! To know God's plan for us! To know that all of the truth can indeed be found in one place, without divisions and without confusion. How blessed we are to have a fullness of the Gospel.

I know that Christ lives! I know this is His Church on the earth today. I know we can each come to gain that testimony for ourselves as we search and study and pray.

I love all of you dearly, and I love this Gospel!

~Sister Larsen



6/22/15-The Church is true, the book is blue, and soon we'll all be Mormons

Happy Fathers Day to all of the fathers and father figures out there! Wishing a Happy Birthday to my very own dad! Congratulations to Sister Rachel Larsen on the completion of such incredible missionary service! Best older sister ever!

We had a lot of rain this week and a few tornado warnings. When it comes to the work this week: up until yesterday, it was just pathetic. In spite of our efforts to get out and find, it seemed like nothing we did produced any results. Yesterday we were scheduled to meet with a guy we met and gave a Book of Mormon to last Sunday. I honestly didn't expect him to be there, let alone to have actually read what we invited him to read. He was there, he had read, but informed us that he was not really interested in what we had to share. He did, however, refer us to his mother-in-law Shelley, who had also read and wanted to keep the copy we left with him.

We found her house and she immediately invited us in, asked all sorts of questions, loved the Restoration. When we invited her to read the Introduction to the Book of Mormon, she replied (almost with an offended look on her face) "I'm not just going to read the Introduction, I'm going to read the whole thing!" She readily accepted the invitation to be baptized and was excited to call her cousin in Arizona, who has recently joined the Church. Before she left, she told us with tear-filled eyes "This morning, I prayed that today would be the first day of my new life. God sent you to me." This is the Lord's work. I am so grateful to be a part of it.

Cindy and Anthony came to church again. We had an interesting lesson with Anthony this past week. He gave one of the funniest reactions I've seen when we invited him to baptism on July 18th. He looked at me, stood up, said "No", walked across the room to grab something, sat back down, saw the look on my face of "What the flip just happened?" and said "There's no way I could just up and join your church in a month. I hardly know anything!" We invited him to read a page of the Book of Mormon and pray to know of its truthfulness every day for two weeks and promised him he would receive an answer. After thinking about the invitation, he looked at me and asked "And what if I don't." "That means you haven't fully applied Moroni's promise." Sitting next to him in church he opened the Book of Mormon up. Out of the corner of my eye I looked where he was. 1 Nephi 14. Good deal.

The Church is true. The book is blue. And soon we'll all be Mormons (at least that's what we hope).

Homework for this week: read Elder Holland's "Cast Not Away Therefore Thy Confidence" talk. Very insightful.

"Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of *him* to declare *his* word among *his* people, that they might have everlasting life." (3 Nephi 5:13)

Elder Larsen

6/22/15-Last Letter of Mission

Dear Family,

How sweet it was to participate in Chester's baptism on Saturday. The ward was very supportive, and Chester had 6 nonmember friends from his residency program attend as well. The Spirit was strong, and it was such a sweet reminder of the "why" of missionary work.

I have felt a lot of emotions as I've reflected back on my mission and prepared to return home this week. The lessons learned are innumerable, and I have just felt such profound gratitude for the opportunity to serve as a missionary, and to serve here in North Carolina. Sometimes it's easy to just get caught up in the "day to day", just "being a missionary", but I've been thinking so much about what that really means. What an honor and a privilege to represent the Savior for 18 months, to feel the kind of love He feels for each of us. Feeling that love for others has really helped me realize how much He loves ME--and feeling that love has truly made me want to change.

So many people in the south believe that Christ will save us--just as we are. I have come to learn that anyone who truly loves us won't leave us just as we are. Anyone who loves us will lift us to be higher and holier and happier. As I have lived the doctrine of Christ, I have felt that. There is no greater joy than being able to look back and say, "Twas I; but 'tis not I". To look back and realize that weaknesses have become strengths, that we have become a little bit more like our Savior. I am so, so grateful that we can change, and--more than that--that we can keep the change.

I have felt so strongly that Heavenly Father knows us perfectly. Growing up, I always wanted to understand the Sacrament, but I didn't. I always wanted to have a strong testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, but I didn't. On my mission, however, I have come to develop such a love and gratitude for the Sacrament, and I have come to gain a strong personal witness--little by little--that Joseph Smith is indeed a man of God, the prophet of the restoration.

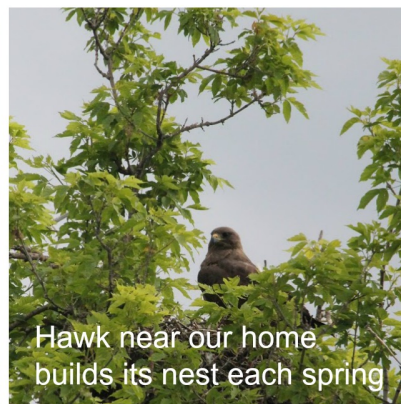
I have felt that testimony grow as I've read from the pages of the Book of Mormon. I am *so grateful* for that book. As I read, I feel such peace, such a closeness to the Savior. I know it truly is the word of God.

I have come to feel that Jesus really is the Christ, the promised Messiah. He lives and He loves us. I know that it is by following Him that we can find true peace--lasting peace. I have felt that peace in my life, and am eternally grateful to have seen that peace permeate the lives of others. I love Him. I am so grateful for Him. "Oh sweet, the Joy this sentence gives: I know that my Redeemer lives."

~Sister Larsen



These geese without a mother found us at Salt Hollow Park in Hyrum, Utah



Hawk near our home builds its nest each spring



Mushroom on our lawn



Our neighbor shows us her chicken



We have a lot of these smiley-face spiders (not poisonous)



Anne Marie's Stake Girl's Camp at Cinnamon Creek (LDS camp near Paradise, Utah)



Anne Marie at Camp Lehi for Girl's Camp



Ampitheatre



Trail



Getting permission to break —
past the barrier.



Joyful Reunion



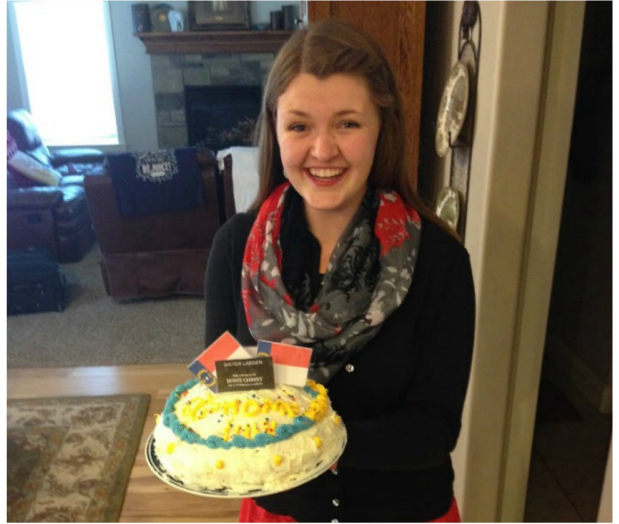
Almost all together again



Rachel and SaraKay



Beloved Family Support



6/29/15-Deer in the Headlights

It was ridiculous, almost pathetic. I will not go into the events leading up to us getting home *really* late Thursday night. The logistics of our evening appointments didn't work out how we had originally planned because *Hoosiers like to talk*. It came out of nowhere. And we were almost home. It jumped out of the bushes almost as an afterthought, just to spite me (I'm sure of it). Too bad we didn't kill it. We were totally fine, the car was not. It caused \$3000 worth of damage. Stupid deer.

#oneofthosethingsthatjusthappenstomakeelderlarsenmad

Oh, and we had the chance of a lifetime this week. We could have been saved by a legitimate Southern Baptist preacher. His invitation: "We can do this, right now. Open up your heart and let Jesus into your life. Are you ready?" It was preceded by a very rude denunciation of our faith. Tempt me, tempt me! We respectfully declined.

We had three investigators at church! It was great! Cindy, Anthony, and Shelley. Shelley being there was a tender mercy. Last week she watched the Restoration DVD on her own, and as we were talking about her during weekly planning texted us to let us know she believed what she heard and saw and had also driven the half hour out to the church building to see it. Sunday morning we anxiously awaited outside the building for her arrival. 8:50...8:55...9:00 no show. During the sacrament I looked up from the sacrament table, and lo and behold there she was! I was so excited!

After church she texted us "I enjoyed everything about your church. I brought some money to donate, but they never passed around the collection plate." Oh, and Anthony teaching Cindy about the Restoration of the Priesthood during Gospel Principles. Bam. Investigator teaching investigator.

I've served in this area for 4 and 1/2 months. It has only been in this last transfer that we've gotten someone to church. As we've exercised faith and put in the effort we have seen so many tender mercies with finding and teaching and preparing for baptism. It's been awesome. Faith precedes the miracle.

I will be departing Wednesday. These past few months have been a roller coaster. Rachel going home. Many of my former companions now gone or preparing to leave shortly. Some of the highest of highs and lowest of lows. That's what makes a mission fun.

I'm looking forward to the second half of my mission. There are people to find, teach, baptize, reactivate, strengthen. I know that this church and this mission are led by inspired men called of God at this time for very specific purposes. So "Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!"

Elder Larsen

7/6/15-Lost in Lafayette

Sounds like everyone had an enjoyable 4th of July! What a great time to get together as families and just have fun. This week's been absolutely *nuts*. We have a lot to talk about.

Cindy gave me a necklace with a cross on it made by one of her friends as a parting gift. I never would have imagined getting so close to someone so different than me. It's what happens as a missionary, and it's awesome. Bishop made me take it off when I wore it to church (I tease!)

I'm now serving in the Lafayette 2nd Ward, about an hour north of Indianapolis. Our area is just west of Purdue campus and consists of upscale apartments and very nice homes. The area was closed for six weeks and we're re-opening it (my third double-transfer in a row) Most of the people we run into have at least Masters if not PhD's. Very nice people for the most part. We live five miles from the nearest workable part of our area and ride through campus on the days we don't have the car. The first day we took a wrong turn and ended up biking for like two hours trying to find out where in the world we were. The second day we made it to campus, but got lost again on a bike trail I thought would take us to our area.

My companion is an Elder Cronin from Glenwood Springs, Colorado. The best way I could describe him (and I'm not trying to be mean) is a chubby little nerdy munchkin with a high-pitched laugh who's been out for 21 months and tries harder than almost any missionary I know to impress women (he's never been on a date in his life). He's super goofy. We've gotten along just fine so far. I'll probably be with him for the rest of his mission.

Let me give you the low-down on the District. There are a set of Elders and Sisters in the two wards our district covers.

Elder Lorsch has been out for just under a year. He's a very charismatic kid from Arizona who likes to have a good time. Super funny. He's training Elder Holle from Washington, a handsome devil who went to school at BYU before coming out. I guess he's the VP of the Bass Fishing Team (?) Sister Griffeth is from Idaho Falls (attended BYU-I before coming out) and has been out about the same time as Elder Lorsch. She reminds me a lot of Rachel (so I tease her a lot!) Her companion is Sister Oskins (also from Arizona), who will be going home at the end of the transfer. Her twin brother is serving in the St. Louis mission. Sister Howard is a swimmer who also attended BYU and is training Sister Ellis. Sister Ellis is very artistic and is going to make a great missionary.

Our zone is pretty stacked. We've got some baller missionaries. It's going to be great. Coming to the area we were given a phone from another area that was closed last transfer, so we didn't have anyone's contact information. No one had a bike rack to put our bikes on, so we put them in the mission trailer and have been borrowing the other Elder's bikes. We walk into the room that was transformed into our apartment and there's a teacher in there filming a movie with some kid and an old guy. So...we slept over at the other elder's the first night. Our furniture was brought to us the next day. When it comes to the work in this area, I don't think anyone's been baptized for a *long* time. We're pretty much starting from scratch. Oh, and our part-time car decided not to start yesterday afternoon. We need all the faith and prayers you've got, folks.

The mission was invited to tour the temple this Sunday before anyone else gets to go through. We've

been asked to bring an investigator. Currently we may have one potential we found out riding through one of the neighborhoods in our area. We're going to need a miracle.

"In the words of President Kimball, thousands of conversions can never become a reality so long as we wait 'for the natural slow growth which comes with natural and easy proselyting.' "Natural and easy" meaning we wait for someone to come and ask us about the Church.

Further, he has said, 'Brethren, the spirit of our work must be *urgency!*' (Quoted in Grant Von Harrison, *Missionary Guide*, 1977, p. 59). And we must imbue our missionaries and Saints with the spirit of *now!*

When the Lord said, 'Lengthen your stride, quicken your pace, heighten your reach, widen your vision, and stretch your capacity,' he was in reality saying 'expect a miracle,' for these are the stuff from which miracles are made.

The prophet says, "DO IT," and he indicates the time is NOW. And expect the miracle."

Elder Larsen



7/13/15-Plans Almost Always Change

It's been an up-and-down sort of week. The bad news is that our investigator Tonya who was planning to attend church and the open house was not able to because she woke up with a migraine Sunday morning and had extended family decide to come over that afternoon. Very, very frustrated.

The good news is that she is progressing towards baptism. She's feeling and recognizing to the Spirit, praying, reading the Book of Mormon, and intends to come to church this Sunday.

A very wise woman once told me "Plans Can Change". As a missionary, I've come to learn that "Plans Almost Always Change". You've got to be flexible. You've got to be patient. You've got to have charity.

We also met with a former investigator named Charie this past week. She's a single mother with two kids studying to be a nurse. Had a good lesson about the Book of Mormon. She agreed to come to church in the coming weeks and give it another shot.

Funny story from this week: I was on exchanges with one of our Zone Leaders, Elder Mortenson out tracting. We were talking to this guy who told us he had lived in Utah for a short time. "We were treated horribly... (that's not the funny part)" "Oh really? We're very sorry to hear that. What part of Utah were you living in?" After he told us Elder Mortenson replied "Can I tell you something crazy? That's where I'm from. Whereabouts did you live in..." Walking away Elder Mortenson turned to me and said "Yeah...we were basically neighbors."

We're gaining traction in this area. Slowly, but surely. We've set some challenging District goals that will make us stretch, but I know that through faith we can achieve them. When it comes to working towards achieving something, a good start isn't nearly as important as faithful endurance.

"This opposition turns up almost any place something good has happened. It can happen when you are trying to get an education. It can hit you after your first month in your new mission field. It certainly happens in matters of love and marriage. It can occur in situations related to your family, Church callings, or career.

With any major decision there are cautions and considerations to make, but once there has been illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don't give up when the pressure mounts. Certainly don't give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness. Face your doubts. Master your fears. "Cast not away therefore your confidence." Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you." (Elder Holland)

With Love,
Elder Larsen

7/20/15-Tonya at Church and The Missionary Moving Crew

Hey Fam!

It's been another crazy week. I don't know if things will every completely settle down. But hey, at least we're staying busy.

Tonya came to church for the first time yesterday and enjoyed herself. It's so rewarding to see investigators you're working with taking those steps of faith in order to come closer to Christ. You could tell she was very nervous, anxiously looking through the chapel door for a place to sit. She was the only African American in the congregation.

We're having dinner with her over at a member's home tonight. The next step for her will be moving her baptismal date up. The soonest she agreed to was January 8th "I always do things in six month periods...but it may be sooner." She understands conversion very well: "I want to do this *for myself*. I want to pray and to read and to come to know *for myself* that these things are true." We're planning to go to the open-house this weekend with her.

The demographics of this area are very diverse. This week we met with Venetka from Bulgaria, Alex from Jordan, and Wyndell from St. Lucia (an island in the Caribbean). There are many people from India, China, Japan. It's awesome.

Story from this week: We met this older Army veteran who is a member of the Jehovah's Witness church out tracting and offered to help him move. He called us up the next day and said he would like some help. We show up at his house to "help" him move and end up "moving him". Two U-haul truck loads. Elder Larsen was not a happy camper. We were sweating bullets. We had to rearrange our whole schedule in order to finish the job. After we finished he went out and purchases \$40 gift cards to Texas Roadhouse. I guess all's well that ends well.

I finished the Book of Mormon this week. Moroni leaves us with some wonderful verses about our quest in life:

Moroni

10:32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

Moroni 7:48 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.

With Love,

Elder Larsen

7/27/15-Tonya and the Temple

First and foremost, I'd like to wish my sister Chrissy a very happy 18th Birthday on the 24th!

It's been a great week. Monday night we had dinner with Tonya and a member family that just moved in to the ward. After a great meal we were sitting around talking. Her four-year-old son Thomas had been playing with the member's 2-year old daughter. Out of the corner of my eye I see him corner her on the stairs and plant a great big kiss on her lips. I'm thinking "Oh my goodness...they are going to beso mad." Fortunately they took it in stride. "Are you kissing our daughter?!" they asked as he walked away wiping his lips off.



We had a great lesson with her Thursday with a member who will unfortunately be moving to Ogden next week.

We've been praying she'd accept the invitation to be baptized sooner than six months from now. She readily accepted October 3rd as her goal date. It was definitely a tender mercy. Then the member invited her to go with his family to the openhouse Saturday. Money.

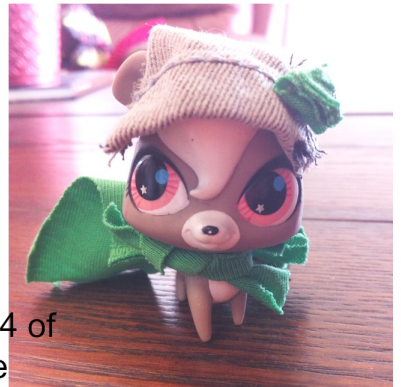
We all had a great experience going. I'm telling you, the Church is the most efficient, effective organization *in the world*. The operation was smooth. We started at the recently completed stake center next door with a video explaining the why we build temples and then made our way through the baptistry, brides room, instruction rooms, and sealing room. The artwork was phenomenal. You'll have to look at the pictures online. The Spirit was very strong, especially in the Celestial and Sealing rooms. They've had twice as many people through than they originally predicted. It's been a tremendous success and will be a huge help in accomplishing the mission's goal of baptizing 500 people in 2015.



I wanted to meet up with Brother Larry Beane (remember him, the guy we baptized in Goshen), who left just before we got there. He'll be receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood and his endowment in three months. Sooooo excited.

I am very proud to say I am a member of Christ's restored church led by a living prophet. I am grateful for the opportunity I have to represent Him in building up His church right now. I know this work is true.

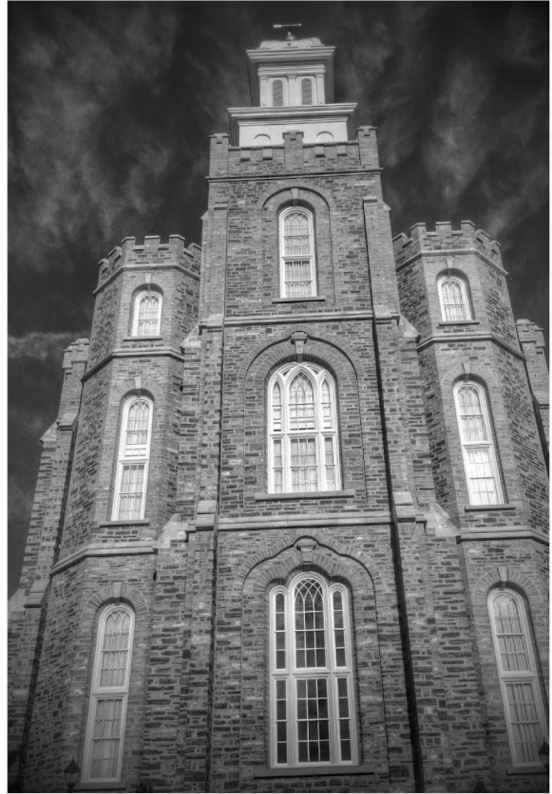
Elder Larsen



Anne Marie is really into Littlest Pet Shop and has 1/4 of the basement dedicated to a Littlest Pet Shop Village



Jared and Anne Marie in Fredrickson's Car







Anne Marie made
Christine's cake



Peaches



Very attractive necklace, Jared!



Our Garden



Steve and Sue Larsen Reunion at Coalville, Utah

















8/10/15-New Investigators



The District 3 from left to right: Sister Oskins, Sister Griffeth, Sister Howard, Sister Ellis, Elder Cronanigans, Me, Elder Holle, and Elder Lorsch

Transfers happen tomorrow. Sister Oskins is going home, Sister Griffeth is staying to train, Sister Howard will finish training Sister Ellis, Elder Cronin and I are staying, Elder Holle is leaving to train, and Elder Lorsch is leaving to serve as a new District Leader somewhere. It's been a

good time.

Saturday was the last day of the openhouse. The Sisters tell me that more than 100,000 people went through it, 25,000 more than predicted. The cultural celebration will be taking place August 22nd with the dedication the following day by Elder Eyring (or so we think...)

It's been a crazy week. The 2nd ward is very transitional; several families moving out and at least fifteen moving in. We've become the Mormon Moving Crew.

We had one of the best lessons of my mission Thursday with two Sisters from the Relief Society and Tonya. Why? Because we didn't say anything. These wonderful Sisters connected with her right after the bat. They reminded me a lot of my grandmas...it was awesome. They were both baptized after having been married. One of the sisters faced intense opposition from her family in doing so and was able to answer Tonya's questions about how to deal with that. A continuous stream of personal experiences and testimony. It was incredible. (She's finally hit a road block. According to what she's told us her family is not too fond of the idea of her joining the church. They've really been trying to bring her back to the church they've all grown up in. She could use your prayers right now more than ever.

We've picked up some new investigators. Cesare is an young single Italian student at Purdue. He let us right into his home and gave us the floor. "Every time you're in the neighborhood people post 'Beware of the two guys dressed in white walking around the neighborhood' on the neighborhood Facebook page." I want to hear what you have to say. He is a devout Catholic who has also served as a missionary. As we taught I fearfully waited for him to cut us off and start tearing into us, but he never did. He humbly received what we had to share and agreed to read and pray about the Book of Mormon and be baptized upon coming to know of its truthfulness. It was awesome.

Biking down the street Elder Cronin and I both felt impressed to talk to this guy pulling weeds outside his home. Turns out he is very good friends with a couple in the ward and had gone to the openhouse with them just days before. When asked about the role religion has played in his life, he responded "I really don't know what to think..." We're hoping to meet with him this weekend.

I gave a training this past week on our perspective and attitude about our missions as well as life in general, relating the story of Joseph Smith's incarceration in Liberty Jail. As part of it I shared this scripture "Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God and for his arm to be revealed." (D&C 123:17) "Cheerfully": we are to have a positive outlook no matter what the circumstances. "Do all things that lie in our power": in other words "...it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" 2 Nephi 25 or as President Monson likes to quote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in saying "Do your duty; that is best; leave unto the Lord the rest." "Stand still, with the utmost assurance": patiently and faithfully wait for the Lord to fulfill his promises. "...all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." (D&C 122).

I love you. I pray for you. I wish you could be here experiencing this incredible journey with me.

Elder Larsen



Logan Temple Trip



Buddies

8/17/15-Ribs and Rips

We have a lot to talk about. I'll try to fit it all in.

First off, some crazy connections made this week. Two members of the ward I'm serving in served their missions in Idaho about a decade ago. Gustavo Amorim from Brazil is one of them. Not sure if any of you know him. The second is a woman from Iowa who was in Aunt Shauntel's young women's group growing up and who also took piano lessons from her. Also, Sister Griffeth's new trainee: Sister Kirsten Jenson from Wellsville, UT! Yeehaw!

The two new Elders in the District are Elder Dunn from West Jordan (who's been out for 20 months) and Elder Bigelow from Layton, UT. Good guys. Looking forward to serving with them.

I wanted to thank all those of the Johnson clan for their sweet notes of encouragement. It meant a lot. Missed seeing all of you at the reunion!

Has anyone had swollen salivary glands before? Not cool. For a minute I thought I had cancer and wouldn't be sitting here writing this email. It was a close call. Thankfully some members of the ward knew what I had.

The cultural celebration and dedication of the Indianapolis temple are this weekend. Unfortunately we won't be able to attend either, but will watch the broadcasts at the church. Hoping to bring Tonya Saturday night. She's doing well. Went to her family's church yesterday because she made a previous commitment. She is moving forward, though. Slowly, but surely.

Friday we had an awesome day of teaching. We were asked so many questions. It was fantastic. In the evening time we stopped by a guy we found last week. I think he's the first person I've actually sat down to teach who does not believe in God. Used to, but not anymore. Incredible discussion about the Plan of Salvation, faith, prayer. It was really funny at the end because he asked us "How come no one has ever invited me to join your church? Not that I'm looking to right this minute, but how would you do it?" I think there's something there. We'll just have to keep digging!

Funny/ridiculous stories of the week:

We went out into the country to help this returning member with a service project. We got there and sat down with him in his living room. "You know what boys, I'm not really feeling like going outside this morning, so let's have a lesson." After an fabulous hour-long impromptu lesson about Alma the Younger's conversion story, we were heading out the door when he said "Have you guys had lunch?" "No..." "Well I was going to throw some ribs in the oven." While the ribs cooked we went out to chop some wood. The logs were very dense. Our system was for me to swing the axe, for he and Elder Cronin to stand on the log while I pulled it out, and then for me to take another swing. Needless to say we didn't accomplish very much. All the while he told us stories of his party life. I'll just say he's probably broken every commandment except for "Thou shalt not kill". Probably. But hey, the ribs were fantastic.

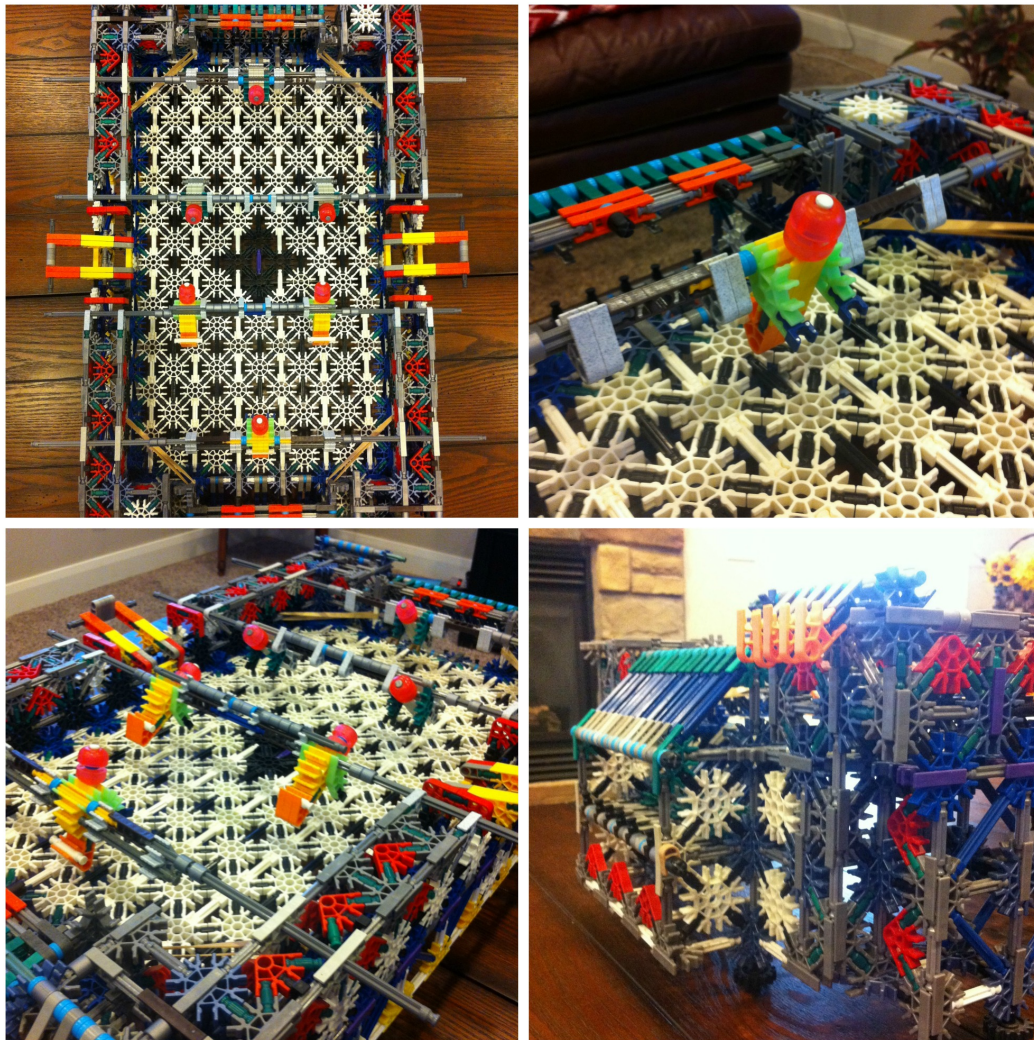
We felt inspired to visit a less-active member of the ward. As we were biking into the apartment complex where he lived he met us out front, flagged us down, and said we were just the people he

wanted to see. Turns out the night before his daughter and her partner tried to knock him out with a hard plastic cookie sheet, steal the keys to his truck and his wallet, and take off. "Good thing I have a hard head. Only problem was they couldn't charge her for assault because there wasn't a mark!" As I was sitting down to hear this story I heard a rip and the ventilation in my pants increased dramatically. Of course we were on bikes miles away from our apartment. Luckily the tear was in just the right place so that I didn't scare anyone.

This email is forever long. The thought for the week comes from a quote I received from some dear friends from my first area, the Maynes: . "When you fear you are drowning in life's situations....don't worry....your Life Guard walks on water".

Love to All!

Elder Larsen



Jared's Foosball Machine He Created From K'nex Parts

8/24/15-Exchanges and Cultural Celebration

Hello Family and Friends and Faithful Followers!

It's been a very memorable week with Zone Conference and the Temple Cultural Celebration and Dedication.

We received trainings on dignity, the language of prayer, effective diligence, and our mission's goal of 500 baptisms. The Spirit filled the room as we all humbly realized how much room for improvement and hard work lies ahead. "There is no comfort in the growth zone, no growth in the comfort zone". We're about half way to our goal of 500 baptisms this year. It's going to take all of our combined faith, prayers, and dedication.

I had a wonderful exchange with one of the ZL's, Elder Mortensen, Saturday on Purdue Campus. Campus missionary work is the life. You live in your area, you can walk everywhere you'd need to go, there are always people outside, and almost all of them are willing to talk to you (and most of the females are attractive...just saying). You don't ever really have to plan, you hardly ever have to work out crazy logistics of transportation or coordinate with the other missionaries in your district when it comes to the work. Goodness.

The cultural celebration was great. You'll have to check it out when it's posted online. I really didn't know what to expect never having seen one before, but it was a good time, especially having Tonya and her son Thomas there. We received some very unexpected and somber news right after it concluded that the Zone Leader's recent convert committed suicide. Very, very sad. He was the my first baptismal interview candidate. We've all been wondering why he'd take his life at a time when he's supposed to be enjoying it the most. Very unfortunate.

The dedication Sunday was truly inspiring. President Eyring and Elder Ballard along with several other brethren were in attendance, with President Eyring offering the Dedicatory Prayer. I don't think there was a dry eye in the room at the conclusion of the dedication. As he closed the prayer I thought to myself "We finally have a temple. These Saints have been waiting for *years* for this incredible blessing. Now it is available to them."

Sunday evening we had Tonya over to Bishop's house for FHE. Her son kept eating the M&M's off of the "Don't Eat Pete!" game board each time it was set up. She seemed to really enjoy herself as did her son. This week we will really be focusing on the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Priesthood. She believes in modern-day prophets, but is seeking a confirmation that Joseph Smith is one of those prophets.

I love you guys. Seriously, the longer I'm out the more I've come to appreciate a loving and supportive family, extended family, and friends. You're all the best!

Elder Larsen

8/31/15-High Highs and Low Lows

This week's had some very high highs and some very low lows. Before I get into it, an interesting church/family history fact:

The movie "Mountain of the Lord" (about the construction and dedication of the Salt Lake temple) has a scene in it where Brigham Young is sitting upon the cracked foundation of the temple pondering what course of action to take in order to fix the problem. The Apostle Wilford Woodruff approaches him, assesses the situation, and then offers a solution. That conversation actually took place not between President Young and Elder Woodruff, but between the Prophet and our ancestor Archibald Gardner:

"President Young dismissed the workmen, and sitting down on the foundation said, 'Here I shall remain until the Lord reveals to me what I should do next.' "He had not been there long when father came into view. President Young motioned him to come to him. "Bishop, sit down,' he said and he then told him of his perplexing problem. Together they went carefully over the matter in hand. The examined the foundation, the materials, the manner in which it had been put together. Then President Young said, 'Bishop, can you tell me what to do?' 'Yes, President Young, the trouble has arisen through the use of too much mortar. The resultant settling has caused the walls to crack. It will be necessary for you to tear out the entire foundation and start over again. This time instead of using mortar, have each and all of the stones in the entire building cut to exact measurement and place stone upon stone with precise fittings. This will prevent cracking, settling or spreading in any way.' President Young brought his hand down on father's shoulder and said, 'Brother Gardner, you are right. That is my revelation.'" From Familysearch

Why do I share this inspiring account? Because sometimes we feel like we are doing our very best with what we have and things don't turn out they way we'd like. This week Tonya dropped us. Reconciling what she's been taught with what she grew up with has proven to be too difficult for her. Feeling pressure from her family and from looking to change careers, she gave in to her doubts and retreated to what she was used to. Very disappointing.

We've knocked almost every single door in our area. And we haven't seen the success we had originally hoped for. This week we "tear out the entire foundation and start over again". Faith, diligence, and "exact" obedience must be increased. A physical temple has just been completed in Indiana, it is up to us to build up spiritual temples to the Lord.

We've seen some tender mercies this week. For the first time on my mission a nonmember on the other side of the knocked on was overjoyed to see us. She was literally jumping up and down with excitement (must be something in the water...) Anna has a bunch of youth from the ward she's friends with and goes to school with. They all wore their cultural celebration t-shirts to school on Monday. Her parents said she is free to pursue whichever religion she feels is right, so hopefully we can start teaching her!

Sunday some youth brought a nonmember friend to church, gave him a triple combination, and introduced him to us. Hopefully we can start teaching Carl, too.

And some new members in the ward invited their nonmember friend to have dinner with us (the

crepes were amazing). We gave Scott a Book of Mormon after teaching him the Restoration. We'd have to pass him off to the ZL's, but we're hoping it works out for him.

So, we've found some new stones, we're sharpening our tools, and will begin again!

Your faith and prayers are the mortar. Please keep them coming!

I love you all!

Elder Larsen



Anne Marie Entered Several Items Into The Cache County Fair (Painting of Cat, Flowers, Bird, Pretzels, and Cupcakes)

9/8/15-Great News from a Previous Area

Last Monday evening I receive this text from Cindy (investigator from my last area). "Elder Larsen I'm getting baptized on the 12th and I want you to baptize me." I'm going to be honest, leaving the area I didn't think she'd be baptized while I was out, if ever. She had been taught for several years and dropped months before I arrived. One of the first things she told us when we went over was that she was not interested in investigating. Period. She would sit in on lessons we had with her kids who had recently moved up from Florida and moved in with her, but was clearly opposed to what we had to say.

A few weeks later she started asking some sincere questions about what we believed. Walking away from her house that morning Elder Anderson and I turned to each other with surprised looks on our faces "She actually might have some potential..."

We started meeting with her several times each week. We got her to pray on her own, then in front of us, read the Book of Mormon, then to come to church for the first time. She didn't understand why she needed to be baptized again. And she had some serious problems with the commandments. Almost six months later she's decided to get baptized. The church is true!

Elder Cronin and I are doing well. We continue to work hard these last two weeks of his mission and find those who are prepared to receive the Gospel. We had dinner with some a nonmember couple Saturday evening. They took requests for the main dish and I asked for crepes. Dean received the text and asked his wife "What are crepes?" (pronouncing it "creepies"). We had a wonderful meal and message. Not sure how interested they are...

Sisters Howard and Ellis's apartment has a really bad bed bug infestation. They're currently living with Sisters Griffeth and Jenson. They've got tons of bites all up and down their legs. Poor sisters!

My team won the multi-zone volleyball tournament...again, even though we lost our first match and had to win five straight matches after that to work our way up from the loser's bracket.
#familyreunionsportspride

I found some spiritual gems in my personal studies this morning I'd like to share with you. Quote from Elder Maxwell about patience being more than waiting: "Patience is not indifference. Actually it means caring very much but being willing, nevertheless, to submit to the Lord and what the scriptures call the 'process of time'." "Patience is a willingness, in a sense, to watch the unfolding purposes of God with a sense of wonder and awe, rather than pacing up and down within the cell of our circumstance."

This is one lesson I feel the Lord has been trying to teach me on my mission. So often we find ourselves saying "I will be happy when..." when instead we should be saying "I am happy no matter what the circumstances." It's one of the most difficult lessons to learn in life. But it's one of the reasons we're here.

I love you! I am grateful for you! And I know that patience is an attribute that leads us to perfection!

Elder Larsen





Photos taken in Idaho
Falls at Johnson Reunion
Steve Larsen



9/14/15-Cindy's Baptism

It was crazy going back to my last area, let me tell you! I'm still not quite sure it actually happened...

We had a good two-hour drive down with our friend Brother Stovall from the ward. He's a native Hoosier who used to drive truck, so he could tell us about just about everything we drove past. "This is the town of Carp. They've expanded the bridge since last time I came down this way..." It was a good time.

It was really fun to see everyone again. Didn't think I'd be heading back there anytime soon, but it was good to be back. Walking into the font I thought "Wow, it has literally been more than a decade since I've been in a baptismal font. The only other time I have been was when I myself was being baptized!" Cindy isn't the most stable on her feet, and it didn't help that she took her glasses off before walking down the steps. Good thing I had her hand coming down, because she slipped down the steps and almost baptized herself!

As you can see in the picture, she is pretty tall, so I was worried about being able to successfully baptize her. Fortunately, all went well and we only had to do it once. It was almost like time stopped to witness her baptism. Throughout the ordinance I felt the Spirit confirming the reality of the Priesthood authority being exercised and the spiritual rebirth that baptism accomplishes. I almost felt like I myself was being baptized along with her. I haven't experienced anything quite like it. It truly was awesome.

We had another really neat experience this past week. Elder Cronin and I forgot the phone going to church Sunday. We had planned to stay up by the church the rest of the day and were reluctant to go back to the apartment and get it. But I kept feeling prompted to go back. So we went back for it and saw a text from some other Elders in the Zone saying to call them back asap. They told us there was a lady from their ward who had been admitted to the hospital and was in need of a blessing. The name they told me sounded familiar, but I had to see if it was the family I was thinking of.

When we made it to the hospital I was touched to see Tom, who had been baptized into Linton Ward by the other Elders shortly after we got there. They had since moved to the area and have struggled ever since being her. He had been unemployed since moving. She had been feeling sick for months and did not look good. I couldn't even recognize her. He explained that they couldn't bring her blood pressure down and that things didn't look good. I was very emotional as we laid our hands on her head and I pronounced a blessing that she would be able to accept the Lord's will and that according to our united faith she would be healed that she and her husband may one day be sealed in the temple.

That night I pleaded the Lord would spare her. There have only been a few times when I have prayed with more intent. A few days passed and we received a call from him. "Elder Larsen, I just wanted to call and tell you that after you gave my wife a blessing she started feeling better. She's now home. And I got a job." My heart was swollen with gratitude that Heavenly Father had answered their prayers and our prayers and healed her by the power of His Priesthood. "O then, is not this *real*?" (Alma 32:35) As a missionary I've really come to realize just how merciful the Lord is. Just how powerful He how. Just how much trust He's placed in the hands of so many young men and women representing His Son Jesus Christ. It's very humbling.

I know God is real. Time and again the Spirit has borne witness to me of His existence and of His love for me and all His children. He hears our prayers and does answer. His Priesthood is operative on the earth. And His Gospel does bring happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. Of these things I am certain.

With Love,

Elder Larsen



Johnson Reunion,
Idaho Falls, ID



Normally we'd be in Alpine, UT where we've been for a couple decades, but I think it is undergoing renovations.



We got rained out so we met inside to hear tales of yester year

9/21/15-The Last of the Crohicans



The District 3: (From left to right) Sister Jenson (dressed as a cow), Sister Griffeth (dressed as a fairy), Sister Howard (Elsa), Sister Ellis (Anna), Elder Cronin (The Cronantula), Elder Bigelow (dude from the 70's), Elder Larsen (Your boy), and Elder Dunn (as himself).

It was supposed to be an ugly outfit competition, but people started showing up in all sorts of different costumes and it turned into just an outfit competition.

The Cronanigans are coming to a close. Elder Cronin leaves tomorrow. He definitely went out with a bang this week. As did I. I was the first

one to go down early in the afternoon. (Looking back I probably could have just stopped and taken the phone call. 20/20 Hindsight). Biking without hands trying to take a phone call while navigating some rough terrain. Later that afternoon we were biking home. I was about twenty yards ahead of him. A cute runner passed by me. Several seconds later I heard a crash. Turning around I see him sprawled out on the pavement. The girl distracted him and he ran headlong into a pothole and flipped over his handlebars. He was pretty scraped up. Tender mercy: a member showed up out of nowhere, took us out to eat, and then back to our apartment to make our next appointment in time.

So. Transfers. Our area is being closed down to Elders after having only been reopened by us three months ago. I'm over it. Elder Cronin flies home Wednesday. I'm training another new missionary as a District Leader somewhere. Didn't see that one coming, but it'll be good.

Mixed feelings leaving West Lafayette. I've gotten really close to a lot of missionaries here. The Ward has been outstanding in feeding us and supporting the work. Wish I could take them all with me to my next area. I'm not going to miss having to bike so far to get to our area or having to stress so much about our car sharing situation in the District. Not going to miss the drama of having so many missionaries serving so close to each other. Toes getting stepped on...

I'm trying to think of tender mercies and miracles we've seen this past week. My mind is pretty scattered right now. The ZL's and Chinese Elders are taking over the 1st ward Elder's and our apartments and they moved all their stuff in last night and slept over. The past 24 hours have been nuts. You don't get much sleep sharing a 4-foot by 7-foot mattress with Elder Chen. ;)

A scripture and quote for you from this past week. The first comes from the story of Ammon and his brethren preaching to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. After much prayer and fasting the Lord comforted and counseled them in preparation for their missions: "...Go forth among the [Hoosiers] thy brethren, and establish my word, yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls." (Alma 17:11) We are to build God's Kingdom here on the earth, but it is not easy. By our examples we become the tools God needs us to be in order to do so.

And a quote from President Monson: "Never let a problem that needs to be solved become more important than a person to be loved." Ammon slinging stones at the marauding Lamanites and beating them with his "disarming" personality was a way of showing love to his fellow servants as well as King Lamoni. There was definitely a problem, but the motive of his actions was love.

Let us be patient in this work of love. Let us hold up our lights to the world, even the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord will be with us as we do so.

Elder Larsen



Chicken at Cache County Fair. Photo taken with iphone – S Larsen



9/28/15-Enter Elder Mortimer

Calling on all recipients of these weekly emails and anyone else who would be so kind as to pray for my new trainee, Elder Mortimer (from Pocatello, ID...any connections?). He could really use some inspiration right now! He's a good guy. Graduated this year. Did debate and swam in HS. Apparently is a lady's man (or so he tells me). Oldest of four kids.

We are serving in the Notre Dame Ward-the area surrounding Notre Dame campus (we're not allowed to proselyte there). I am back in the ghetto, where everyone drives suped-up cars with huge wheels and shiny rims blasting some form of rap music.



Where the whole neighborhood lives out on their porches. Where people stop you on the street and tell you they love Jesus and want something to read about Him. It's a good time.

4th Double Transfer into an area in a row. Cleaning up the apartment, all the old records from the past five years or so, finding our way around, walking across town because we weren't left with any miles for the car and won't get our bikes until this weekend. Meeting lots of fun characters: "My Mormon Brothers, how ya doin'?! I'm not gonna lie, I been up to some 'mischief' lately. Will you come

back on a day when I won't be doin' any 'mischief'?" ...uh....hard pass...

Or a phone conversation with a former investigator who moved to New York "Yeah, the house I moved into to nanny has pet ferrets in the room I'm sleeping in, so I've been sleeping with a shirt tied around my face so that I don't smell them..." Ok.

We've seen a lot of tender mercies already. Our investigator Stephen (who has "investigated" for quite a while) picked us up and drove us the five miles to where we were going to work. We ended up having a good lesson with him and he even drove us to our next appointment. We've been in contact with a guy who referred himself to the missionaries. He wanted to meet with them before he went to church, but they never contacted him so he just showed up at church last week. We'll be watching conference with him this Saturday.

We were out tracting and knocked on a door. The lady next door opened her door (that awkward moment) and we ended up teaching her the Restoration and getting a return appointment to meet with her and her husband. Lilly's humility and sincerity were so evident as we bore testimony to her and she asked questions about what we were sharing. It was awesome.

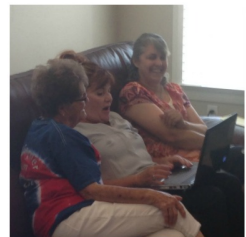
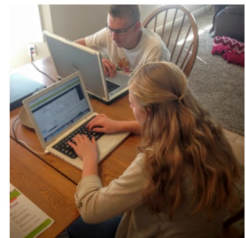
Our WML Brother Burton is a total boss. He's from Canada and is going to school here at Notre Dame. He had us over for dinner day 2 in the area, has been calling less-actives and part-member families to feed us, arranging transportation for us, asking members to come to the return appointments we've set, given us people to stop by...on and on and on. Super pumped to work with him.

The goal President Cleveland has set for us this transfer is to find, teach, and baptize a family this transfer. I know that with faith and diligence we will be able to.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, even as you desire of me so it shall be done unto you; and, if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation. Say nothing but repentance unto this generation. Keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work, according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed." (D&C 11:8-9)

Much Love,

Elder Larsen



10/5/15-Conference Weekend

"I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen...and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me. For even at this time, my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you; but the Lord God doth support me, and hath suffered me that I should speak unto you...And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you." (Quotations from Mosiah 2)

Sunday morning session of General Conference watching our beloved Prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, clinging to the pulpit gasping for breath to bear His testimony of Jesus Christ and His Restored Church was the first time in my mission I have wept. Seeing this man who has had one of the greatest impacts on my life bearing his special witness of our Lord and Savior very possibly for the last time touched me in a way I don't ever remember experiencing before. The Spirit filled my soul with an undeniable witness that President Monson is the living Prophet of a living God.

Conference this past weekend was a very spiritual experience. Seeing the 98th, 99th, and 100th Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints filling the shoes of spiritual giants who have had an enormous impact on the world. Reflecting on the lives and ministries of President Packer and Elders Perry and Scott. Hearing inspired messages from the leaders of this church answering the questions we've been struggling with and confirming our testimonies of our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel we've come to know and love.

I feel so blessed to be a part of this great work. We have our ups and our downs, but take comfort in knowing we are on the Lord's errand. We had a wonderful lesson with Jose and Lilly this past week. So sincere. Such good questions about what prayer is and how we are to pray. Such a spiritual outpouring watching them commit to reading and praying and coming to know these things are true for themselves. We're looking forward to meeting with them again this coming week.

We had a pretty cool experience this past week. Here in Hoosier country we talk to and teach a lot of people we are confident we'll never get anywhere with. We talked to this old guy out on his door step: clothes ragged, cigarette in one hand, beer in the other, rough speech (you get the idea). Taught him a short Plan of Salvation lesson and set up a return appointment for Sunday morning (of course he's not going to be there). We knock on his door...Surprise! He lets us right in, sits us down at his kitchen table, tells us he read the pamphlet and had some questions. Great questions. We teach him a full Plan of Salvation lesson. Tears filled his eyes as we testified of the Atonement of Christ and His love. He accepted the invitation to read, pray, meet again and to be baptized. After praying with him we walk out the door looking at each other like "What just happened?" We're excited to meet with him again this week.

It's going to be a great week. Interviews with President Cleveland. Zone meeting. Dinner with a polynesian family (we'll see if I can out-eat them). It'll be a good time.

Thanks for all you wonderful people do! I feel so blessed to have you in my life!

Elder Larsen



10/13/15-Jose and Lilia and Broken Bikes

Dear Family,

Best of luck to Sister Williams, Sister Killpack, and Elder Welch as they are embarking in the service of God. You're going to be wonderful missionaries!

Thank you all so much for the kind birthday wishes you've sent. I'm doing my best to be patient and wait to open the letters and packages until the 23rd. I really appreciate you taking the time to write and for your continued support and encouragement!

This week has been good. Interviews with President Cleveland went well. He and Sister Cleveland are fantastic. I was counseled to help Elder Mortimer have fun doing the work. We can do that.

Our investigators Jose and Lilia are doing well. We met with them twice this past week with our WML Brother Burton and another Brother from the Ward. Brother Burton served a Spanish speaking mission in New Mexico and was able to teach them in Spanish for the much of the lesson. Even though they speak great English, they really appreciated hearing the message in their native language.

The second lesson they actually brought friends to meet with us. These friends turned out to be former investigators of the Spanish Elders who we were able to pass on to them. They also requested that we send missionaries to meet with their son living in San Diego. Before the lesson started she brought out some freshly made "pigs-in-a-blanket" and slices of bread with a special topping on them. They had watched the Restoration DVD, have been praying, had such good questions. Jose and Lilia are such good people. So humble, so open to learning, so prepared for the Gospel. He has this weekend off and they're planning to come to church. Please pray for them!

We're actually working with another Hispanic family, the Diaz family. He grew up in the church, she's a convert. They've been sealed in the temple. They've been less-active for a while now. Doubts, conflicts with ward members, and a busy schedule have driven them away from the Church. They actually fed us these past two Sundays. We had an appointment set up this past Sunday for after our dinner appointment. We show up and they had cooked all these tacos for us to eat. I silently prayed that the Lord would expand my stomach and help me handle eating so much food. It was rough, but I did it. So many tacos. We committed them to pray each day and to read Alma 32. So much potential as active members of the church. It's so hard to see them inactive. I do have faith they will return to activity.

We had a pretty neat experience this past week. So I broke another spoke on my bike. We got that fixed. We also got my other bike's tire fixed by a member. I wanted to take this second bike for a spin on Friday. We're quite a ways from our apartment and the tire blows. We called the other Elders to come pick us up. There we sat on the side of the road. I was mad. We had all these people to stop by and here we sat not able to go anywhere or do anything. After sitting there a while a car pulls up and a guy gets out and asks if we need any help. "Yeah, I heard your bike tire blow back there. Do you need a ride somewhere?" We ended up having a really good conversation with him about his faith and the Restoration. It turned out that he lives in the apartment complex of the other Elders who were coming to pick us up. They showed up, we introduced him to them. It's cool to see that the Lord is in

control, *especially* when things don't go the way we planned them to.

I love you all! Keep the faith, for truly it is your faith will keep you going!

Elder Larsen



10/19/15-The Lord Needs You Now



Exchanges with Elder Porter. Don't mess!

Hello Family!

It's been a great week. Jose and Lilia came to church yesterday!!! And they're looking forward to coming back! Holla atcha boy!!!

We met with them Friday night and shared Alma 32. Having desire, developing faith through action, seeing the fruits. They actually had another friend there who had also met with missionaries before. They're praying, reading, talking to each other about what they're learning. "We want to read more of the Book of Mormon in order to come closer to God. When are you coming over next?" They are so sweet. Please keep the prayers coming!

Elder Porter and I had a neat experience on our exchange Thursday. We were visiting with their investigators who are scheduled to be baptized this coming Saturday. Maurice has really been struggling with knowing that there are Prophets on the earth today. As he and the Sisters (I really don't know why they were there) talked with him I felt impressed to share the last two paragraphs of the Book of Mormon and Alma 32 (the duct tape chapter of the Book of Mormon, it can be applied to just about everything) and bear testimony. As I started talking the chaos around us all settled down and I was able to focus on him. After sharing what I felt inspired to share, we all sat for a few minutes and then concluded in prayer. Afterwards he told Elder Porter "Thanks for bringing him. That really helped." Learning to follow the Spirit in teaching as a missionary is so important. Without it, conversion does not take place. Hearts are not softened and changed.

There's a talk by Lawrence E. Corbridge entitled "The Fourth Missonary" I've been studying lately. Even though it's catered to us missionaries, what he talks about applies to all of us. I thought I'd share a few quotes with you:

"...the good that you do will do you no good unless your heart is right, unless you have charity."

"You may permit the Lord to change your nature if you give yourself to Him and to His work. He

cannot work on that which He does not have, and he cannot have you unless you give yourself to Him." (Lawrence E. Corbridge)

"The greatest battles you will ever fight will be within the silent chambers of your heart." (David O. McKay)

"That is the battleground between what you want and what the Lord wants. If you surrender, if the Lord wins, you win also. The only way to win is to lose. Lose yourself in the Lord's work, and you will win beyond your wildest imaginations..." (Lawrence E. Corbridge)

"Give me all. All of you. Hand it all over to me...give yourself to me and I will make of you a new self in my image. Give me yourself and in exchange I will give you Myself. My will shall become your will. My heart shall become your heart." (C.S. Lewis)

"The purpose and central blessing of life is change. It is to be changed to become more like Jesus Christ. It is to incorporate into your character, the qualities of His character...it happens only if you do not fight against God. It happens only if you unconditionally surrender your will to the Lord." (Lawrence E. Corbridge)

If you want to see some real world applications of this principle, watch the Addiction Recovery videos. The Lord needs you, and He needs you now. Give up whatever is stopping you from giving your all and love Him with all you have and are and you will be happy. The Atonement is the power by which you will be able to do so.

Elder Larsen



Good ol' Wellsville on Founder's Day



Taking the Girls to College!





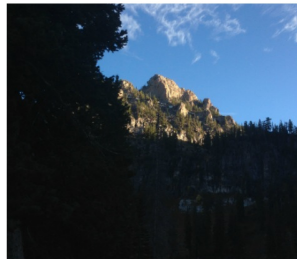
Christine's first apartment at BYU-Idaho







White Pine Lake
Campout--Friday
Sep 18th





Anne Marie
singing at General
Women's Meeting



Savannah's Farewell to St. Louis, Missouri



Jared - Cross Country



Cravens report their mission





Anne
Marie's
Birthday
Rap



10/26/15-Elder "Ken" and/or "Buzz Lightyear"

Dear Family,

Thank you all for making my birthday this past week so special!
You are all so thoughtful!

Life is full of excitement. We never have a dull moment. And we found that swinging on vines is a much better mode of transportation than walking.

This week has been absolutely *nuts*. Three baptismal interviews, two fun exchanges, and trimming up a bunch of trees.

There are certain experiences you have as a missionary that really teach you to rely on the Spirit. Conducting a baptismal interview is one of them. You literally represent Jesus Christ in determining if a baptismal candidate is ready to take upon them His name as a member of His church. It's intense. I called the member of the mission presidency responsible for this area with a question and he asked "Elder Larsen, what is the Spirit telling you to do?" Man, this work calls for some hard core inspiration and revelation.

We had exchanges with the Zone Leaders and the other Elders in the District this week. As a "Michiganary" in Niles Elder Kent (who's going home in six weeks) and I had a great time talking about our missions, pre-mission life, post-mission life, it was fantastic. Except my stomach was in bad shape after having had chili ten times in a row. Don't ever do that.

Exchanges with Elder Kretschmer. Conversations about prayer, faith, the Plan of Salvation, revelation. He's awesome. Really tall, lanky, athletic guy. No one we stopped by was home, but we still had a good time.

The District saw three wonderful individuals baptized and confirmed this weekend. The South Bend Elder and Sisters have been working with Maurice, Racine, and Heather for months. This week all their faith and hard work finally paid off.

The Mission Department has asked that we do 8-10 hours of service each week, so we spent a bunch of time Saturday helping some members of the ward spreading mulch, trimming trees, and cleaning their house in preparation to sell it. Elder Mortimer and I both had some sort of an epiphany while there because their daughters reminded us a lot of our sisters. Sitting around the dinner table in our service clothes we both simultaneously thought "This is just like home..." It was pretty weird. Oh, and I had a dream about being home. I remember being surrounded by family and friends and thinking "I still have seven months of my mission left. What am I doing here?"

A funny/traumatizing experience from this past week: the primary president asked us to come to primary yesterday and be "judges" as the kids practiced performing their primary program. If the kids

did well they got to cut off a piece of the the ties we were wearing (don't worry, they were some of Bishop's old ties he had donated to the cause). Turning primary children loose with sharp objects to cut off a piece of our ties...sketchy. I was scared for my life, but the kids loved it. These pieces cut off of our ties became trophies the kids wore around their wrists, around their necks, attached to their clothing.

Another funny thing from this week: I've been told I look a lot like Ken (not sure whether to take that as a compliment or not...) and/or Buzz Lightyear (more respectable). We were asked to help pass the sacrament yesterday. As I was passing by one of the kids kept saying to his mother, "Look Mom, it's Buzz Lightyear!" It's a good time.

Jose and Lilia continue to progress. They couldn't come to church this past Sunday because he had to work. We're meeting with them tonight and looking forward to having them to church this Sunday. Please continue to pray for them!

We had a pretty neat experience yesterday afternoon. Elder Mortimer gave his first Priesthood blessing of healing. We were given the records of this guy in the ward no one knew who was living in a care facility. I called and talked to him on the phone and could hardly understand what he was saying. I was a little reluctant to go over, wondering if he was even there mentally. But we decided to go, anyway. Turns out he had had a stroke a few months ago and was in recovery. This stroke had impaired movement on the right side of his body, causing his speech to be slurred. We showed up to his room and he gave us a look and asked "What do you want?" After talking to him for a few minutes he became comfortable with us and opened up. I prayed to be able to understand what he was saying and was able to do so as he continued to talk. We gave him a blessing before we left and are planning to visit him again next Sunday.

So yeah, it's a good time. This week Elder Mortimer and I are going to Specialized Training for Trainers and Trainees in Carmel. Ward Halloween Party Friday. Transfer calls this weekend (the district will be staying the same). The work moves forward. I love you all and hope you have an enjoyable time with your Halloween festivities and fall activities.

Elder Larsen



The kids sold our pumpkins. Aunt Stephani bought almost all of them.





Kimie Wood



Cambry
Christensen



Neal Sessions



Lorna Farnsworth



Breea Holbrook

Bonnie's
Piano
Students



Shanalee
McBride



Cory Wood



Paul Sessions



Jeremy Killpack

Pumpkin Walk



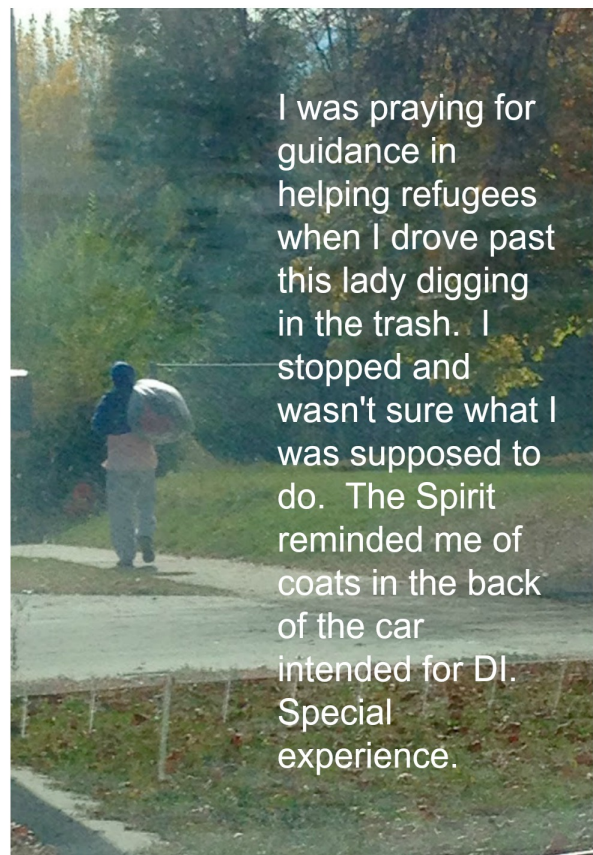




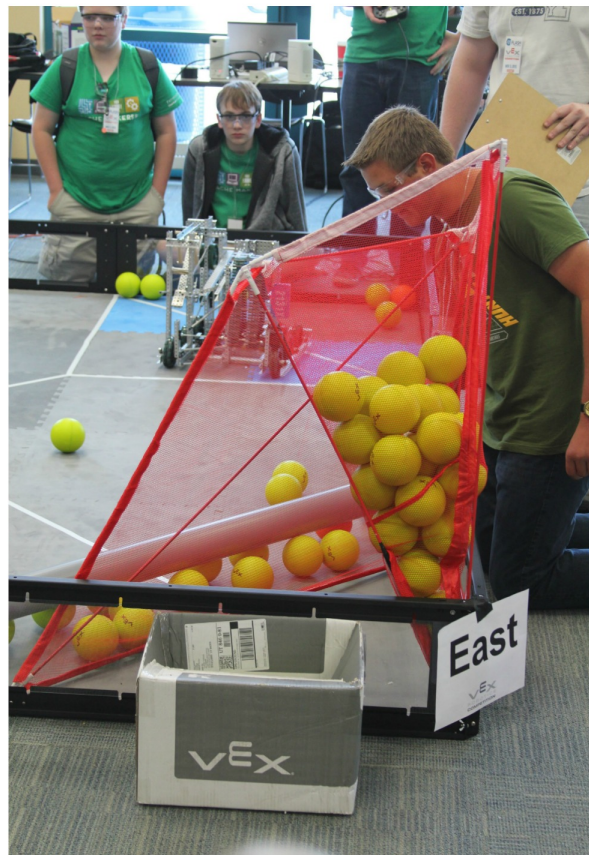
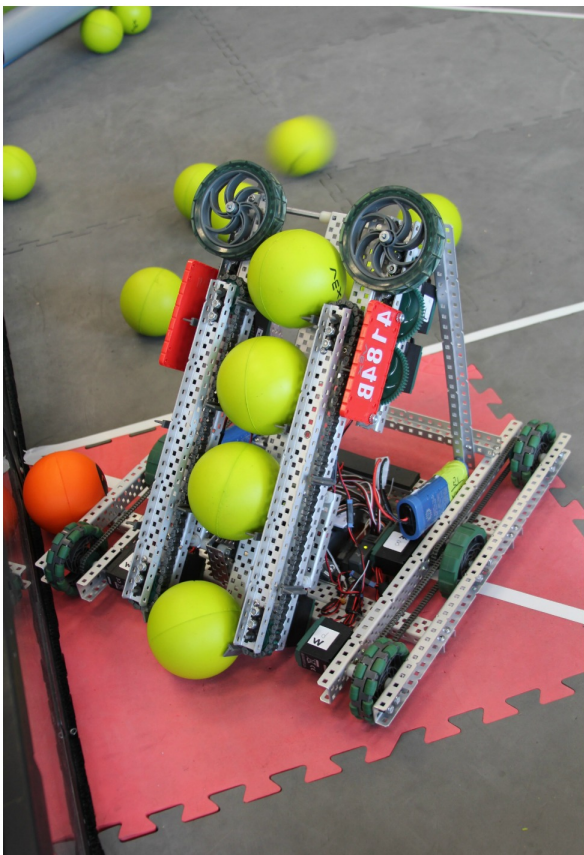
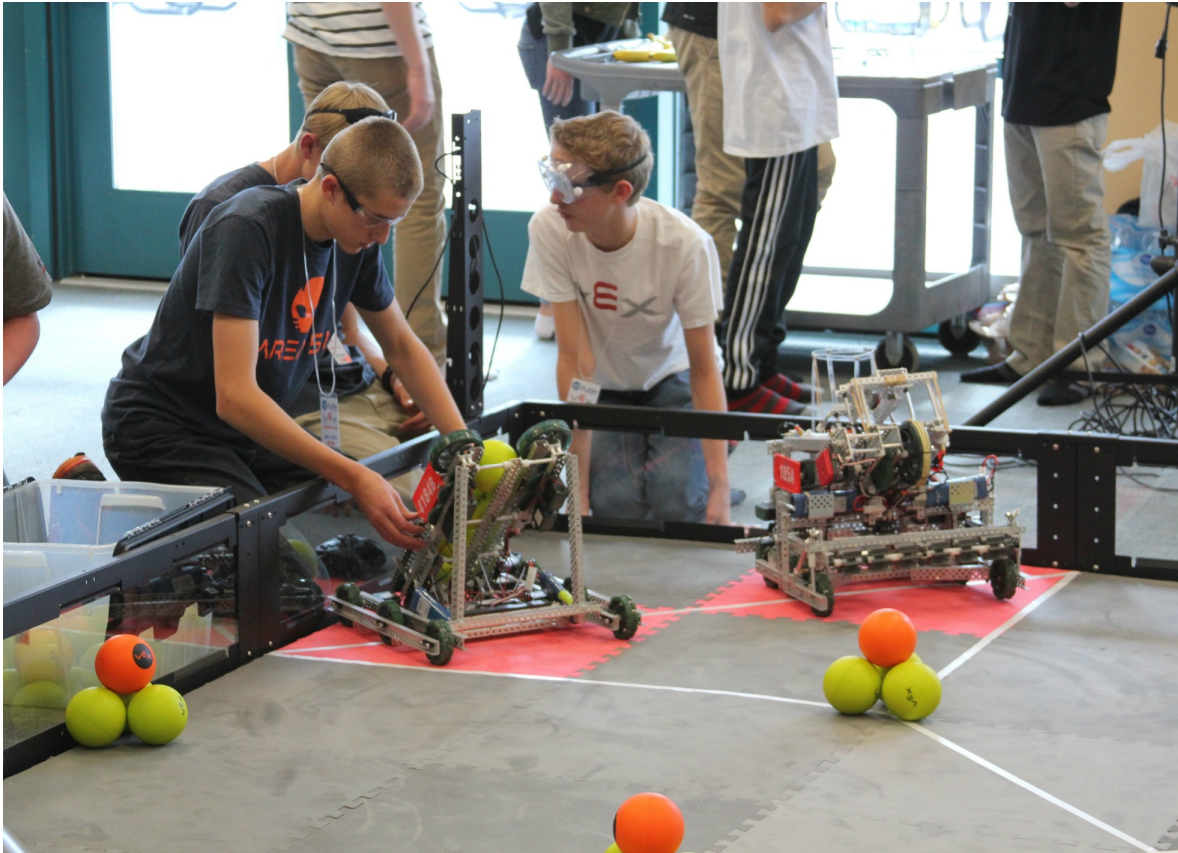
Rachel's Choir Concert, BYU-I



Logan Temple

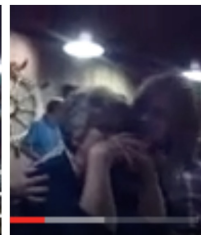
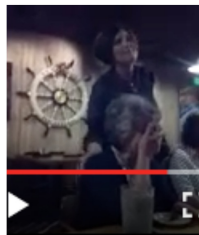
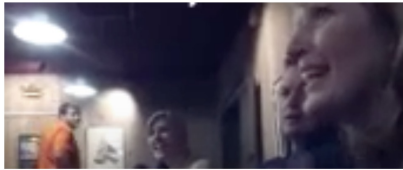


I was praying for guidance in helping refugees when I drove past this lady digging in the trash. I stopped and wasn't sure what I was supposed to do. The Spirit reminded me of coats in the back of the car intended for DI. Special experience.

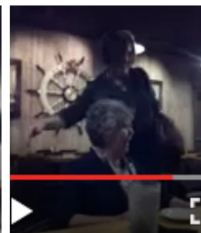


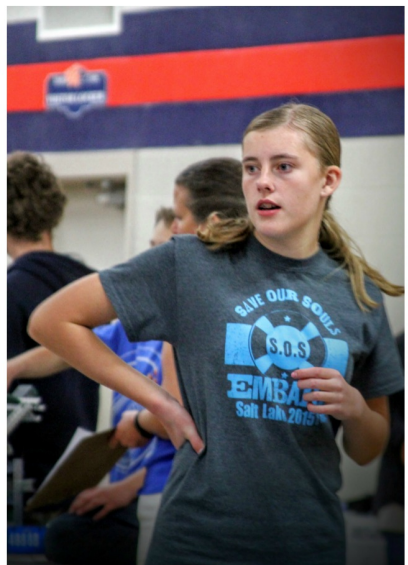
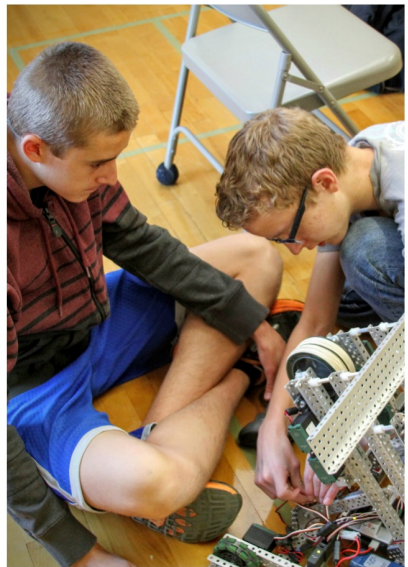
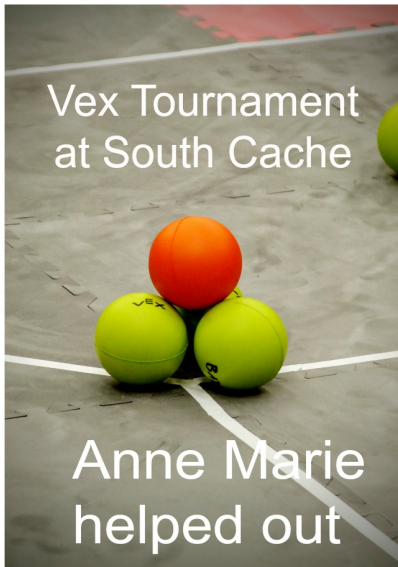
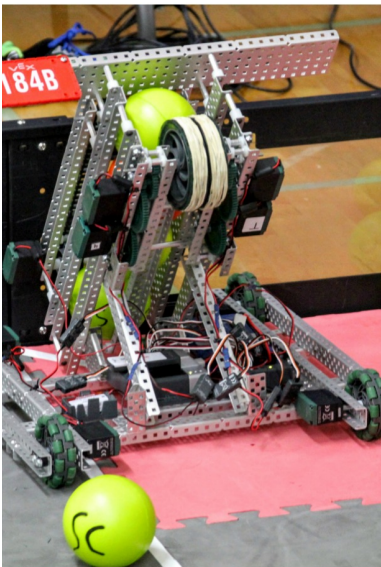


Ever child except Jonie, John, and Paul came



Celebrating Grandma Larsen's 70th







11/2/15-#larsensdon'tlose

These are trees an artist is carving at a nearby park. Couldn't tell you why this picture is significant...

Hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable Halloween! It's been another crazy week. We drove down to stay with some other missionaries Tuesday night before driving to Indy with them the following day for specialized training. We thought they lived in one city, but apparently they lived in another city an hour further south, so needless to say we got to their place way

past curfew. I am grateful we made it without incident.

The training we received was very inspired and very applicable. Looking around at the groups of trainers and trainees I made the very sad realization that I was the *oldest* missionary training. Of course it's my second time doing so, but still it made me want to cry. Then I remembered Kung Fu Panda "Don't cry." -Master Shifu

Jose and Lilia brought their friends to the Ward Halloween party Friday night and had a great time. Their struggle right now is finding time (and motivation) to read the Book of Mormon for Jose and balancing priorities for Lilia. However, she has been reading. Monday evening she shared a verse with us from her studies that really touched me: "I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith..." (1 Nephi 1:20) Some of her associates have been trying to discourage her from meeting with us. She told us she told them "Look, this is my decision. If you keep trying to tell me what to do then I'm not going to do Social Justice anymore." That's hard core.

Oh, and at the Ward Halloween Party I won the donut eating contest against a dozen other ward members (you know, when they hang donuts on a string and see who can eat it the fastest without using their hands). Beat the runner up by about fifteen seconds. #larsensdon'tlose

I think it did a lot to gain the trust of the ward, because we have meals with members every day for the next three weeks. #that'swhatwedoston

From when we first arrived in the area, member trust has increased exponentially. Now we're going on splits with them, they're talking to their friends and inviting them to meet with us. It's exciting. We were doing some service with a brother from our ward putting some thin concrete slats on top of the pergola he built. When we went to pick them up from the supplier he introduced us to the couple who ran the business. We ended up giving them our contact information and offered to help them out with some service. Elder Mortimer had a great conversation with the delivery guy about who we are and what we do as missionaries. This morning before driving here to the library to email we saw a lady out walking her dog in our apartment complex. "Yeah, I've seen you guys out and about before. You always look so clean-cut. I'd love to hear about what you believe..."

Missionary opportunities are *everywhere*, even if you live behind the Zion Curtain ;) Everyone wants to be happy and is seeking the Gospel, whether they know it or not. Pray for opportunities and you will be given them. Yesterday we were out tracting (it was rough) and ended up teaching this young father who had recently lost his job. Tears filled his eyes as we bore testimony of God's love and of prayers being answered. "It's funny you're here, because I was just telling my friend I wanted to get back into church. I'm really grateful you came today. Thank you so much."



Later on that afternoon we saw a guy getting out of his car and started up a conversation. Turns out he has investigated many different faiths and is still looking for truth. We gave him some pamphlets and our contact information. It's great.

With love,
Elder Larsen



11/9/15-This is Salvation

I was thinking things would settle down this past week, but life continues its unexpected, exciting course at an ever-increasing speed!

We helped Jose and Lilia build a retaining wall out of cinder-blocks in their front yard. It was pretty exciting. I'm pretty sure Lilia could beat me up if she wanted to. She was throwing those blocks around like no one's business. I love people who know how to work. Oh, and she's an amazing cook. She made us steak burritos afterwards...so good. We watched "Hope of God's Light" and talked about developing our faith and gaining a testimony.

That night we met with them again in a member's home. Lilia brought a butter hazelnut flan cake she had made and we had one of the most Spirit-filled lessons of my mission talking about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and baptism. Last night they committed to working towards being baptized on January 9th. Please pray for them! They'll be leaving for San Antonio for weeks the first weekend of December to visit family, so we're doing all we can to help them solidify their testimonies.

This week we went on splits with the ward missionaries. After stopping by a bunch of people without any luck, we stopped by a part-member family we've been trying to get a hold of since arriving in the area. This time they were home, invited us in. She expressed the desire to come back to church after years of inactivity. And her husband's all for it. We'll be meeting with them again Friday. Hopefully we can start teaching him.

And Bishop's nonmember friend finally came to church yesterday with his kids. We're hoping to set up a time to meet with him in Bishop's home for dinner sometime this week.

So yes. God is good. We're seeing a lot of miracles.

We had an interesting/crazy lesson/throw down with an "investigator" of sorts. He had watched several films produced by the church and was asking us some questions, one of which was the church's stance on the definition of marriage and what is acceptable. He ended up flying off the handle about how we are "old-fashioned" and need to "catch up with the times". That "God's standard had changed as made known to him" and that we needed to "accept him for who he was because that's the way he was created".

His criticism led me to reflect on the testimony that I have of the Restored Gospel. This is the Church of Jesus Christ back on the earth today, led by Prophets and Apostles called of God and given His authority. God's standards *do not* change. Politics, popular opinion, personal views-they do not, cannot change the commandments He has given us. Period.

We love everyone. We do not close the doors of our chapels to anyone. Anyone who meets the standards God has given us through His prophets may qualify for membership in His church. This is not intolerance. This is not discrimination. This is salvation.

No one is perfect. That is why we have the Atonement. That is why we are here, to repent and prepare to meet God. It is through living the Gospel that we find happiness here and eternal life in the world to

come. I have tasted of that fruit which is "most sweet", which has "filled my soul with exceedingly great joy". It is there for you. Walk the path, hold to the rod, and do not be "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

Elder Larsen



11/16/15-Just Serve



La Familia de Reyna (Jose y Lilia). Ellos son muy bueno. Los amo mucho.

It's been a great week. Jose and Lilia came to church again. It happened to be the primary program, which was really neat. Through song and speech they pretty much taught the first three lessons, which is a win. This past week we had a special lesson on the Atonement, Repentance, and Forgiveness. There are some deeply-rooted family issues they are dealing with with their children. Going to San Antonio they are going to try to reconnect and reconcile with their kids living there. They offered to take us with them...I just may take them up on that :) We'll have to see what President Cleveland says...

This week we also met with the Mattix family (the family we finally got a hold of a few weeks back). She came to church as well for the first time after years of inactivity and plans to bring her nonmember husband next week. Members are really reaching out to neighbors and associates inviting them to church and to meet with us. One member we had dinner with this past week texted us saying "So six of my friends committed to coming to church this Sunday..." Like, who does that? Things are popping. It's wonderful. I love this ward and this area.

We came up with a program to implement the Ward Mission Plan in the area, the "Model for Member Missionary Work". Inspired by a talk given by an Elder Carlos E. Asay back in 1977, we teach members three simple steps leading up to their inviting people to meet with us in the member's home. Members pray every day for a month and fast for missionary opportunities for themselves, share the Gospel with others, and set goals to invite their friends to meet with us. We text them scriptures every morning to remind them to pray and look for missionary opportunities and keep track of the people they're focusing on and find over the next four weeks.

With the "Just Serve" program the church has launched, we've been doing a lot of service recently. It's really opened doors and hearts among members and nonmembers that otherwise would probably have remained shut. Saturday morning Bishop took us over to a less-active single sister in the ward to trim

trees and bushes and take out a wooden bench buried like fifty feet deep (not really, but it was difficult). We were able to really connect with Bishop and this good sister and enjoyed doing it. That afternoon we raked leaves for two families in the ward (there are a lot of leaves here).

Speaking of trees, this morning I read Jacob 5. This allegory speaks of our day and our role as member of the church. Let us not forget that this is His work and His glory. What a privilege it is to serve *alongside* him in this great work of salvation.

"Wherefore, go to, and call servants, that *we* may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard... Wherefore, let *us* go to and labor with our might this last time, for behold the end draweth nigh, and this is for the last time that I shall prune my vineyard...and if ye labor with your might *with me* ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself against the time which will soon come...And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their might; and the *Lord of the vineyard labored also with them*; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things."

Let us not forget that this is His work and His glory. What a privilege it is to serve *alongside* him in this great work of salvation.

Elder Larsen



11/23/15-Bottom Retainers and Tender Mercies



This week. Never to be forgotten. Elder Mortimer was eating a tootsie roll. All of a sudden he paused and pulled it out of his mouth. There was a curved piece of metal stuck in it. Turns out he had pulled out his permanent retainer on the bottom set of his teeth.

Monday night we exchange with Elders Porter and Kretschmer. I take Elder Porter into our area. We bike a lot. It rains a lot. We teach a lot.

Then I go on exchanges with Elder Clark (one of the ZL's), who's actually a third cousin (#thechurchmakesasmallworldevensmaller). He's a total boss. It was such a breath of fresh air to serve with an experienced missionary who loves the work. We killed it. We were teaching left and right. Met with Reyna's again at a members and had dinner. We brought bread. Lilia brought some really good home made cookies. (Did I mention she's an amazing cook?)

Jose: "You guys are happy like all the time. And so is everyone you've introduced us to. It's kind of weird. And you bring a special spirit into our home. After you leave it's there for a while, and then it leaves." We're starting to read the Book of Mormon with them over the phone each night.

Then we biked a lot. And it rained a lot. (Sound familiar?) And we found a smart phone that won't stay on for more than ten seconds for us to find out whose it is. Then Elder Mortimer and Elder Kent meet up with us Friday morning. On exchanges, Elder Mortimer had somehow rammed a pallet into his left big toe and broken the nail. That night we went to the doctors and it all checked out. Only problem is we were there for two-and-a-half hours. I was pretty upset. #patienceisavirtueiamstillworkingon

Then the doctor came in, and with tears in his eyes thanked us for what we do as missionaries. (He had seen and probably been taught by missionaries in Puerto Rico). As Elder Mortimer was paying the bill the doctor ran out from the back, took one of the pieces of paperwork the receptionist was handling, and went back into the office. Turns out he had paid the X-ray bill.



Then we go to the Japanese club dinner hosted at the church by some members of our ward and talk to a bunch of students and families from Japan living in the area. The next morning we rake leaves in the snow (yes, it finally snowed...a lot) And we rip out wooden benches and fences with our bare hands. It was pretty exciting. Sunday morning Sister Mattix brings her nonmember husband to church (score!). That afternoon we spend out looking for less-actives and hearing a good brother quote poetry to us. For dinner we have rib-eye steak. And now I'm here. So, that's our week.

With Thanksgiving this Thursday, I wanted to share some scriptures about gratitude:

"That ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth, and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you." (Alma 34:38)

"And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more." (D&C 78:19)

With Love,

Elder Larsen





11/30/15-Thanksgiving

A dog is an Elder's best friend...that is until it decides to chase you and eat you.

Hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving! What a wonderful opportunity to get together with family and friends and express gratitude for those things we are most grateful for in our lives. Most of all for a knowledge that the things that are truly most important in this life can be

forever.

This week has been very busy and full of excitement. Almost getting rear-ended by a semi while riding with the High Priest's Group leader on the highway. "Oh, I guess this lane merged into the other one!" Three Thanksgiving dinners (thank goodness they were on different days). The turkey bowl. Exchanges with Elder Kretschmer. Lots of lessons with our investigators. Helping people move. Drama in the District.

We had a pre-Thanksgiving dinner with the few active YSA at a member's home we go to each week. We also had a nonmember and less-active there. Our family tradition of sharing one thing we're grateful for served as a great thought. The Spirit was incredibly strong as we all took just a moment to reflect on the past year and on the Lord's hand in our lives. It was really neat.

Thanksgiving day we spent with some recent converts and their nonmember families. So much food! It was funny to see the nonmember family members mixing cocktails for the meal. Not something I'm used to seeing as part of a Thanksgiving meal! Great missionary opportunity to meet all of them, though!

Thursday night I get a call from a Sister who attends the Spanish branch but wanted to introduce us to her caretaker, who she had been sharing the Gospel with. This Sister told me where this girl lived. Oh, I was upset. It was just outside our ward boundaries. Soooo....I brought Elder Kretschmer on exchanges to teach her. This girl's had a rough life. Started living with an abusive boyfriend at age fourteen. Single mother raising two children and working. She was so humble, so receptive to what we taught. Even though the environment was not nearly what we would have liked it to be, the Spirit was very strong in bearing testimony of the truth of what we taught. It was the first time I had put someone on date the first visit in a long time. She went to church with the other Elders yesterday and is looking forwards to baptism at the end of December. Even though she doesn't live in our area, I felt very blessed to have been able to help her along the path to happiness and eternal life.

Lilia's sister Esther has been in town this week from Mexico. Doesn't speak any English, so Monday night we read some scriptures from El Libro De Mormon en Espanol. We had the three of them over to our WML's house for a lesson and dinner Saturday afternoon. Luckily, he's fluent in Spanish and was able to teach Esther the first discussion and answer her questions. They came to church again yesterday and will be coming to the Ward Christmas Party this Friday. My vision for a multi-generational family in the church is coming true! Reyna's leave for San Antonio next Monday, so please continue to pray for them!

This week we also met with a co-worker Bishop has been talking to about the Church in Bishop's home and had a wonderful discussion about prayer, the Holy Ghost, and the Book of Mormon. This friend is going through a very difficult divorce which has caused him to really turn to God. He's a very humble, sincere guy. Really hoping we can start teaching him. He's got a busy schedule, so we'll have to see what we can do!

This week Elder Nash is coming to the mission. We'll be heading down to Indy this evening. Hope everyone has a wonderful week!

With Love,

Elder Larsen



12/7/15-"All In"

Hello All!

I keep thinking that maybe one day life will slow down. Needless to say, I've been proven wrong time and again.

Mission Conference was fantastic. Elder Nash had some wonderful insights and inspiration to share with all of us. One of my biggest takeaways was to be "all in". This morning I was reading in Doctrine and Covenants 64. One of the phrases that really hit me is found in verse 22: "...for I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men." He needs *me*. He needs *you*. Not just our time and efforts; He needs a broken heart and a contrite spirit, a willing heart and mind. I've heard it said: "Don't *go* on a mission. *Become* a missionary."

The same applies to all members of the church: "Don't just *go* to church, *become* a disciple of Jesus Christ. Don't just do what you're asked to do, *magnify your calling*."

We do what we think, and we become what we do. *Sanctify yourselves*.

Jose and Lilia left for San Antonio yesterday. Please pray for them. They're confronting problems they've dealt with for years and will be relying upon the testimonies they've gained in the weeks we've been meeting with them in the face of opposition and persecution.

This week we've had some wonderful experiences with our WML and ward missionaries. We finally got in touch with a sister who hasn't been to church in years. She's divorcing her Catholic husband, who has been encouraging her to join the Catholic church. When we showed up she was really on the fence between going through with it or not. It was really neat to see Brother Burton teach and testify of the Restoration of the Gospel through Joseph Smith and invite her to come back. It'll be a process, but I really think she will.

We also met with the nonmember grandson of a less-active sister who's been bringing him to church. Joe has had a really rough life for only being twenty years old. He was sincere with his questions and his desire to come closer to God. "Yes, I would like to be baptized, but I don't think I'm ready to come to church every Sunday, yet."

We had our ward Christmas party Friday. Thursday night we helped string up all the paper snowflakes on fishing line and set up all the tables and chairs. It turned out really well. Jose, Lilia, Esther, their friend Veronica, her daughter Melody, and their friend Cesar all came. Lilia is one of the best member missionaries I've seen, and she's not even a member! The Mattix family also attended as well as two ladies Elder Clark and I met on exchanges a few weeks ago. One of them gave me her address. It was one of those "Yeah, we'll have to stop by sometime..." Well we did, invited them, and they came! Turns out that Emma had actually been to the church before to do family history. Pam took pictures of everything and is planning to mail them to us, so that's fun.

We tracted into a lady who had met with missionaries before. She was not interested, but told us she volunteered for the Animal Shelter downtown and could use our help decorating a float for a

fundraiser they were having when we asked if there was anything we could help her with. So, we went. The bed of this trailer they were planning to decorate was covered with leaves, sticks, and mud. After we shoveled everything off we set up a Christmas tree and decorated it and put down some hay bails for people to sit on. It was a fun project. We made friends with a lot of the staff there. They even showed us a baby screech owl that had lost its eye. Have you seen a Furby before? Yeah, that's exactly what it looked like, but it walked around. It was great. And, one of the staff there has an aunt in California who is a member of the church and has been doing a bunch of family history.

Last night the members we were eating with invited us to go to a Christmas tree lighting dealio the apartment complex was having. We ate cookies, drank hot chocolate, and sang Christmas songs together as we watched them light the Christmas tree. It was really neat to gather together with all of these students from all around the world and unite in celebrating the birth of someone they knew hardly anything about. One day.

This email is forever long. One more story, kind of a funny one: we get a call from Bishop Thursday. He tells us about this nonmember who had called Salt Lake City totally distraught after having lost his "Finding Faith In Christ" DVD that he watched every night to go to sleep. They referred him to Bishop. "Yeah, I'm sure the missionaries can give you one." We show up and turns out he had found his DVD after having looked for it for a whole month. This African American dude is like in his fifties. His apartment looked like it had been ransacked. "This is my baby, my pride and joy. I can't go to sleep without it. I like to have movie marathons to watch all my church movies: the Restoration, Finding Faith In Christ, the Ten Commandments." We gave him a copy of the Testaments. He called us Sunday morning to tell us he had already watched it twice. It's incredible how people from all cultures and backgrounds are touched by the Spirit and lost without it's influence.

Lots of tender mercies. Transfers are next Tuesday. I'll probably be leaving as much as I'd like to stay in this wonderful ward with all these great people. They've been so good to us.

Love to all!

Elder Larsen

12/14/15-Leaving Notre Dame

This is the first area I've served in on my mission I've not been ready to leave. The Notre Dame Ward is *the best*. These past three months serving with these good people have been fantastic. It's been so difficult saying goodbye to all of them. The good news is that most of the grad students in the ward are from out west, so I'll probably get to see them again at some point in the future.



This is the Nelson Family (with some friends in the picture on right). When we asked if there was anything we could help them with after a dinner appointment, they took us seriously. Weeks later we've probably spent close to fifty hours trimming hedges, pulling weeds, putting slats on top of a pergola he built, cleaning, packing, moving furniture, loading the truck in preparation for them to move to Iowa. They're so great. We spent a lot of time over there this week. The first night packing

the truck only a few brothers from the ward showed up. We had a dinner appointment scheduled and ended up just sending Elder Mortimer to in his service clothes (don't worry, he was with a male member the whole time) while I stayed to finish. Their daughter Esther (standing next to mother) reminds me a lot of Anne Marie. And yes #familyreunionpride

Another service project this week: setting up a live outdoor nativity at a Methodist church. That was fun. We had to leave early, so I never got to see the miniature goats, but I'm not bitter.

So a couple of weeks ago I talked to an old African American dude on exchanges with Elder Kretschmer. It was one of those "Yeah, we'll have to stop by sometime...(probably not)" We did end up stopping by. He and his wife Edna had read the pamphlet. They had a friend there with them. We taught the Restoration. The next lesson her nephew sat in. All three committed to reading the Intro. to the Book of Mormon. The next time we stop by they've all read the Introduction. They've also gone out to the church to see it. "Your church is beautiful. We'd really like to go inside." He's actually a non-denominational itinerant preacher. He's going to be preaching at different churches the rest of this month, but is looking forward to attending church in January. These guys have also been meeting with another set of missionaries from "the other church with missionaries". "Yeah, we don't really like those guys. They're just trying to convince us. There's not a very good feeling when they come. You guys are different. You invite us. And we feel good when you are here. We know you are of God and speak His words." We'll have to see what happens with them.

I'm really excited for my next area and companion(s). I will be forever grateful for the time I've had to serve with these good people and anxiously await to hear what happens with all the people we've taught here.

I'll share with you one of the last scripture I sent out to all the members in the Notre Dame 3-step group:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him...and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)
This is one of the things I've felt God has been asking me my whole mission. Come, love, and become through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. That is His invitation to all of us. What a wonderful time of year to do so!

Much Love!

Elder Larsen



12/21/15-"The Fresh Princes of Franklin" (A Boy Band)



Life *could not* be better. This will be the best transfer of my mission. I'm now serving in a trio for two weeks in Franklin (southeast of Indy) with two of my best friends in the mission Elder Roper (from Idaho Falls, my ZL in West Lafayette) and Elder Farnsworth (from Layton, my DL in Linton). I could not be happier. If you'd like to get a better understanding of how I'm feeling right now, listen to "There Can Be Miracles" from the Prince of Egypt.

Elder Farnsworth goes home on the 30th, and Elder Roper goes home at the end of the transfer. Every day has been a blast. A trio is so. much. fun. We're doing work.

We put two investigators on date this past week: Anna for (a lady who's been investigating for several months and has just recently quit smoking for three weeks now) for January 17th and Webb (a motorcycle dude who has several relations in the church) for March 5th. Most people think you can't get any work done in trio, but we find and teach really well together.

We had a really neat experience this past week teaching James. He's someone we tracted into, taught a Restoration lesson to (he was totally out of it) and set up a return appointment with (not expecting him to be there). We bring a member the next time we show up. "So I figured out that you guys are Mormons..." (Oh no...here we go...) "One of my favorite music artists is a member of your church. People are always saying bad stuff about you guys. I want to hear what you have to share." Powerful lesson. Giving him the Book of Mormon he was extremely grateful, handling it and setting it down as if it were made of porcelain. He's had a really rough life. He's been compelled to be humble. Hopefully now we can lift him higher.

The ward here is great. Elders Farnsworth's been serving here for six months and is on good terms with everyone. This week we helped install a laminate floor, move furniture, set up and take down the Ward Christmas Party, sing in the choir, and sing as part of a special Christmas Program for the YM and YW. #mormonboyband

So much food. *So many sweets*. No wonder missionaries put on weight. Dessert after every meal. Take home leftovers. Special deliveries. Holy smokes.

Hanging up Christmas lights in the apartment along with the stockings and presents under the little tree, reminiscing about past companions and areas and memories together, everyone getting hyped up about Star Wars and Christmas, random outbursts of singing from Elder Roper, voice impersonations and movie quotes, Elder Farnsworth throwing all sorts of objects at me, Elder Roper attacking us with a giant wooden spoon in the middle of the night. It's great.

My favorite talk from the First Presidency Christmas Devotional was President Uchtdorf's. I'd like to leave you with the closing part of his address.

”He is the Gift-Giver!“

”When we, His children, plead for bread, He does not hand us a stone,” President Uchtdorf said.

“Rather, He endows us with gifts so sublime and precious that they exceed our ability to fully comprehend and even imagine.” These gifts include, peace, joy, abundance, protection, provision, favor, hope, confidence, love, salvation, and eternal life, he said.

“This Christmas season we celebrate the greatest gift of all, the one that makes all other gifts possible—the birth of the babe of Bethlehem. Because of Him, ‘the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ. He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death’” (Mosiah 16:8-9).

I know that God lives and that He is a loving God. He blesses us more than we’ll ever be able to understand. I feel so blessed to be on His errand, trying to follow in the footsteps of His Son Jesus Christ. I know that Jesus Christ did come to the earth, born in the most humble of circumstances, lived, died, and lives again, giving hope to all of us. May we remember Him, His life, His love, His sacrifice, and rejoice to be members of His church on the earth today.

Merry Christmas

Elder Larsen

12/28/15-The GQ OG's

Holy smokes. Thank you all so much for your the letters, packages, love and support you sent. I really appreciate it. There are a few letters that got sent to my last area that we're still trying to track down, so I thank you for those in advance. You guys are great.



Last Monday after emailing all of you I was waiting for my stud companions to finish emailing. A guy sitting at an adjacent computer motioned for me to come over his way. He proceeded to tell me he had met with missionaries years before and really enjoyed reading about church history, though he was not interested in joining the church. He did, however, agree to meet with us later that afternoon. It was a really interesting experience.

He had read the Book of Mormon several times, but he had never prayed about it because an Anti-Mormon minister of another faith had told him it would change his life. We invited, we encouraged, we bore down in pure testimony (2 Nephi 32:8-9) The four of us knelt down on the wooden floor of his humble second-story and each offered a prayer. He was the last to pray. My heart sank as he prayed "You know why I can't pray about the Book of Mormon..." We all just sat there as he looked at us expectantly. I was pretty frustrated. Why would you trust some fool you don't even know who teaches people not to pray and ask God questions over three representatives of Jesus Christ who carry the Spirit and know what's best for you. Agency, man. It's a killer.

Prayer is *so* powerful. It makes sense why Satan does all in his power to stop us from praying. Christ's sufferings in the Garden of Gethsemane, His infinite and eternal sacrifice, began with prayer. Prayer began the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the latter-days. It is through prayer that each of us individually comes to know God.

We had another interesting experience this week. We received a referral for a guy who was trying to get together a group to prepare a meal for the homeless in Indy for Christmas. We told him we would ask Bishop and get back to him. As Elder Roper relayed Bishop's response to him over the phone, he told us he and his wife were looking for a church and were particularly interested in investigating the Mormon church. "Is there someone in your congregation who would be willing to come teach us about your church?" "Yeah, I think we can make that happen ;)".

Christmas conference was a blast. There's such an incredible outpouring of the Spirit this time of year as we remember Christ and reflect on how we can better follow His perfect example. My theme for 2016 is "Living a Christ-Centered Life" (See Richard J. Maynes conference address form this past

October). I helped Elder Roper arrange a rendition of "So Long, Farewell" from the Sound of Music for all the departing missionaries to sing. It was really neat.

We got together with some other missionaries Christmas Eve to carol to the residents of a nearby retirement home. It was really neat. And we actually sounded good. We were able to sing all the parts, do a little dub-step remix with a few of the songs... People started following us around in their wheel chairs from room to room. It was awesome.

I took Elder Christofferson's Christmas challenge to "...sit for a few quiet moments and let the Savior's Spirit warm [me]...", to "...sit quietly with that little baby and come away spiritually strengthened and better prepared for all that is going to come later..." It was a very spiritually profound and memorable spiritual experience which I will not be soon to forget.

My beloved companion Elder Farnsworth will be ending his mission tomorrow. It's been such a pleasure serving with him these two weeks here in Franklin. I'm looking forward to serving the rest of this transfer with Elder Roper. We've got a lot of work to do.

Sure love you all! Happy New Year!

Elder Larsen

